

## TALENT Act

### To Aid Gifted and High-Ability Learners by Empowering the Nation's Teachers Act

#### Overview

There is a clear national need to develop the talent of the more than 3 million gifted and talented learners in the U.S., whose performance is falling behind that of students in other industrialized nations. It is well documented that gifted and talented students have special learning needs requiring specialized educational services if they are to reach their potential. Unfortunately, a lack of federal investment in this population means that availability and access to these services depends solely on state and local funds, which is highly variable and unpredictable. This underinvestment in excellence is exacerbated by the singular focus on low-performing students under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, and has resulted in a new achievement gap—the gap between minority and economically disadvantaged students who are gifted and talented and their more advantaged, high-ability peers. Researchers have documented a growing gap on both statewide assessments and on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) that, at current achievement rates, will take decades to close.<sup>1</sup>

Limited federal leadership, coupled with a singular focus on grade-level proficiency, has resulted in an educational system that too often fails to address the unique learning needs of gifted students and those who could become high achieving with appropriate supports.

#### TALENT Act: Key Provisions

Success in the 21<sup>st</sup> century requires a commitment to developing student talent as early as possible. To address this urgent need, gifted education supporters have introduced legislation to amend the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) to provide responsible federal leadership in meeting the needs of gifted and high-ability students. *To Aid Gifted and High-Ability Learners by Empowering the Nation's Teachers* (TALENT) Act, which replaces the Javits Act, has four key emphases:

- 1. Changes to Assessment and Accountability Systems:** The TALENT Act seeks to ensure that assessments are able to accurately determine student mastery of state content standards, which will enable teachers to make appropriate instructional adjustments. The Act also makes changes to the accountability and assessment system to ensure that all students make learning gains. The TALENT Act will:
  - Require that state assessments are vertically aligned and able to measure student knowledge of standards established above their grade level.
  - Establish a requirement that states, districts, and schools report learning growth for their most advanced students on state report cards.
- 2. Emphasis on Classroom Practice:** Identifying gifted and talented students and supporting their needs in the classroom requires specialized knowledge and skills, yet more than 60% of teachers have never received training in gifted education strategies. To address this paradox, the TALENT Act expands professional development opportunities in gifted education pedagogy for teachers nationwide and develops research-based best practices. It will:

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<sup>1</sup> Plucker, J. A., Burroughs, N., & Song, R. (2010). *Mind the (other) gap: The growing excellence gap in K-12 education*. Bloomington: Indiana University, Center for Evaluation & Education Policy.

- Require states to include in their application for funds under Title II, Part A Grants (nearly \$3 billion in 2010) a description of the comprehensive strategy that a state will use to improve the knowledge and skills of school personnel, including teachers, principals and counselors, in indentifying specific learning needs of gifted students and tailoring instruction to meet such needs.
  - Authorize the *Professional Development and Best Practices Grant Program*, a targeted, competitive grant program that will conduct schoolwide and classroom-based research to develop innovative instructional practices and provide high quality professional development for teachers, principals and other school personnel on strategies known to be successful with this special-needs population.
3. **Focus on Underserved Populations:** The TALENT Act responds directly to the concern that advanced students of color and those from low-income backgrounds are losing academic ground compared to their more advantaged, high-ability peers. There is strong evidence that these students do not move into the top achievement levels over time, and those who do reach high levels do not remain in the top achievement percentiles. The bill recognizes the traditional federal role in addressing the needs of students in poverty and focuses on students in Title I schools and rural schools to ensure they have adequate support to achieve their full potential. The Talent Act will:
- Require Title I schools to describe how they plan to identify and serve gifted and talented students, including high-ability students who have not been formally identified as gifted.
  - Require states to include in their Title I plans steps the state will take to assist local school districts in supporting gifted students, including high-ability students who have not been formally identified. States are also required to develop a recognition programs for districts that increase the proportion of their underserved populations of advanced students scoring at the advanced level or higher on the state academic achievement tests.
  - Expand the Rural Education Achievement Program to allow for funding and services to support gifted and talented students who live in rural communities through activities such as professional development for teachers.
  - Establish a priority for underserved, high-ability students in the professional development and innovative instructional practices grants under the Act.
4. **Emphasis on Research and Dissemination:** The TALENT Act recognizes the development of best practices in gifted education through research and data collection as essential to effective teaching and learning. The bill addresses these essential components and importantly, includes a critical dissemination requirement so that more districts have access to the latest developments in the field. The bill will:
- Initiate a competitive research grant program to investigate the effectiveness of strategies to identify and serve gifted and talented students, including high-ability students who have not been formally identified as gifted.
  - Establish a National Research and Dissemination Center that will conduct research on strategies for identifying and teaching gifted students, develop resources for teacher training and professional development systems and for parents to help them support their children's education, and disseminate findings broadly, including to the network of technical assistance centers established by the Education Technical Assistance Act and by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.
  - Direct the Secretary of Education to collect data and report on the education of gifted and talented students to ensure that the nation's most advanced students are getting the educational supports they need to achieve at the highest levels.

NAGC urges support of the TALENT Act to systematically ensure that all high-ability students, regardless of their zip code, are able to maximize their potential. The nation cannot afford to delay.