



TAGT 2013 Policy Goals

Background

For the benefit of the gifted students in Texas, the Texas Association for the Gifted & Talented (TAGT) focuses its advocacy on goals that will strengthen programs, services, and funding for gifted and talented education. The goals must address the current statewide decisions affecting education, in general, and especially those that impact gifted and talented education. TAGT advocacy will focus on timely issues such as the impact of the 82nd Texas Legislature cuts to public education funding and the upcoming full implementation of the new STAAR accountability program.

Restore State Funding to Public Education

The 82nd Texas Legislature reduced public education spending by \$5 billion, including discretionary funds. Restoring the funding to public education is critical to school districts. Without funding, many programs, including those serving gifted and talented students, are likely to be scaled back or eliminated. Efforts to tap the Rainy Day Fund and proposals that would raise state revenue are issues that will receive TAGT's full consideration.

Protect the G/T Weight/Allotment (Funding dedicated for gifted education)

In the last legislative session, lawmakers considered a school finance bill that would have eliminated all special allotments, including the G/T weight. Such a proposal may be considered again next session. TAGT must continue to advocate for the preservation of the funding specifically dedicated to gifted education for G/T services to remain viable in public schools.

Seek Campus Distinction Designation

The new STAAR accountability system will be fully implemented this year. Like TAKS, STAAR will grade campuses based on standard test scores in the core subject areas. Unlike TAKS, STAAR has a component to recognize campuses beyond standard test by allowing campuses to earn a distinction in five categories:

- 21st Century Workforce Development
- Physical Fitness
- Fine Arts
- Second Language Acquisition Programs
- Academic Achievement in any of the four foundation curricular areas

Gifted and talented education may gain more relevancy and stature under the campus distinction component of the STAAR program by contributing to campuses earning distinctions, particularly in the categories of 21st Century Workforce Development and Fine Arts. In addition to these five categories, the Commissioner may award a distinction to a campus with a significant number of students below grade nine who perform satisfactorily on an end-of-course (EOC) exam. Many gifted students across Texas are taking high school courses in the seventh and eighth grades that would help a campus achieve this recognition.

STAAR seeks to change some districts' narrow focus on standardized test scores and recognize those who provide a rigorous education for gifted students. STAAR could incentivize districts to improve gifted services and to provide programs that are more robust. TAGT urges its members to work at the district and campus levels to ensure that gifted services are included in conversations about the new accountability system. As the criteria for earning distinctions have not been set by, TAGT and its members can play a role in shaping that policy.

Encourage TEA to Collect and Disaggregate Data about Gifted Education Programs and Services

TAGT believes the Texas Education Agency must gather data in a simple and straightforward manner about the gifted and talented programs and services school districts offer. This is not to evaluate or rank school districts, but to provide data about the services offered as part of districts' gifted programming. This will create greater transparency for taxpayers and for parents who need the information to make informed decisions about their children's education.

National News

The National Association for Gifted Children has helped craft a major new piece of legislation, sponsored in the House by Rep. Elton Gallegly (R-California) and Rep. Donald Payne (D-New Jersey) in the Senate by Sen. Bob Casey (D-Pennsylvania) and Sen. Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa). This bipartisan bill would amend the Elementary and Secondary Education Act to provide 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:

- **Changes to Assessment and Accountability Systems**
- **Emphasis on Classroom Practice**
- **Focus on Underserved Populations**
- **Emphasis on Research and Dissemination**

Texas Senate and Texas House

Write, e-mail or tweet your state senator and state representative. Let them know that you support gifted education and advanced academic programs, and the restoration funding for public education. See the TAGT Policy Goals at the end of this document.

How to Contact Your Representatives

E-Mail address: first.last@house.state.tx.us or first.last@senate.state.tx.us

If you have the time and opportunity, you can try to set up a visit with your legislators when they are back in your home district or meet with office staff members. You can also set up an appointment if you are in Austin. It is important to make yourself and your opinion known!

Representatives for Zip Code: 78645

Texas U.S. Senators - U.S. Senators represent the entire state. Texas' current U.S. Senators are Senator John Cornyn and Senator Ted Cruz. See their websites for current contact information.

Texas U.S. Representatives

Congressional District 10--Congressman Michael T. McCaul

Congressional District 25--Congressman Roger Williams

Texas State Senators

Texas State Senate District 14--Senator Kirk Watson

Capitol Phone: (512) 463-0114

Capitol Address: P.O. Box 12068, Capitol Station, Austin, TX 78711

Texas State Senate District 24--Senator Troy Fraser

Capitol Phone: (512) 463-0124

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Phone: (254) 939-3562

Texas State Representative

Texas State House District 47--Representative Paul D. Workman

Capitol Phone: (512) 463-0652

Capitol Address: P.O. Box 2910, Austin, TX 78768

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Key Legislators to Contact

(* = Republican)

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