

TALENT Act Charts New Course for Gifted, High-Ability Students

CEC-endorsed bill focuses on teacher development, closing the “excellence gap”

Arlington, Va., June 12, 2013 – A bipartisan bill introduced this week in the U.S. House of Representatives shifts the education debate in Washington, D.C., towards a focus on gifted, high-ability students—particularly those from low-income or minority backgrounds—who have been overshadowed in a federal educational system that focuses on its struggling, low-achieving students.

Special and gifted educators are applauding the bill, **To Aid Gifted and High-Ability Learners by Empowering the Nation’s Teachers or TALENT Act**, which provides teachers, school districts and states with the support needed to better identify and serve students with gifts and talents through changes to assessment and accountability provisions, increased professional development, and the development and dissemination of evidence-based best practices in gifted education by amending the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).

“It is time that the United States to make the commitment to identify and focus on our high-ability students and provide them with the services they need, as well as providing their teachers with the resources they need to serve this deserving segment of our student population,” said Christy Chambers, president of the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC).

“Children of means who are high-ability are afforded many more advantages than their high-ability peers from low-income or minority families,” Chambers said. The TALENT Act would actively seek out students who are gifted and high-ability among these neglected populations and begin to close the excellence gap that exists between them and their more advantaged counterparts.”

The TALENT Act, introduced June 10 in the House by Rep. Jared Polis (D-CO) and Rep. Tom Latham (R-IA), joins an identical bi-partisan effort in the Senate led by Sen. Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa), Sen. Robert P. Casey (D-Pa.), and Sen. Barbara Mikulski (D-MD).

“Too many talented students, especially in areas with high poverty rates, don't have access to the support and opportunity that allow them to reach their potential,” said Rep. Polis. “The Talent Act offers no-cost strategies to help identify outstanding

students, provide opportunities for them to excel, and help all children live up to their full potential."

Although there are approximately 3 million students identified as having gifts and talents in the United States, recent studies indicate an underrepresentation of students from low-income or minority backgrounds as top performers on statewide assessments and the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), known as the Nation's Report Card. Known as the excellence gap, this achievement discrepancy typically carries through a student's educational career and beyond.

"Current education policy neglects the needs of high-ability students, particularly those in rural areas, and the TALENT Act would give states and local school districts a better way forward to address them," Rep. Latham said. "This no-cost legislation would help more of our gifted youth in Iowa and all across the country realize their potential and prepare them to lead their generation."

The TALENT Act meets the needs of gifted and high-ability students in four key areas:

1. **Changes to Assessment and Accountability Systems:** The TALENT Act would ensure that assessments more accurately measure the knowledge and skills of high-ability students and proposes changes to the accountability system to emphasize the highest performance levels.
2. **Increase in Professional Development:** The TALENT Act recognizes the critical role of teachers as the catalyst for learning and academic growth and as such seeks to expand professional development opportunities in gifted education pedagogy for teachers nationwide.
3. **Focus on Underserved Populations:** The TALENT Act responds directly to recent research demonstrating a growing "excellence gap" at the top achievement levels between students from low-income backgrounds and their more advantaged peers by emphasizing opportunities for students who are economically disadvantaged, English language learners, individuals with disabilities, and individuals from rural areas throughout the bill.
4. **Emphasis on Research and Dissemination:** The TALENT Act recognizes that the expanding research in gifted education is the foundation for the success of our nation's students with gifts and talents.

For more information about CEC, visit www.cec.sped.org

CEC is an international community of educators who are the voice and vision of special and gifted education. CEC's mission is to improve the quality of life for individuals with exceptionalities and their families through professional excellence and advocacy.

