Different Paths to Accountability:

Defining Rigorous Outcomes for Gifted Learners

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Curricular reform is an intense process.

Broad-based reform—like that at the statewide level—takes on complexities that may not be easily predictable. Two states, Texas and Florida, with a large diversity of gifted populations, learn from each other as they experience creating curriculum standards for their gifted students. This article addresses the issues and dilemmas faced when committees of gifted educators in both states began redefining and designing their gifted curriculums. It follows Texas through the process of developing a scope and sequence and a parallel approach with Florida's design of the curriculum frameworks for K–12 gifted learners. The approach taken by these two states with different paths to accountability emphasizing rigorous outcomes for gifted learners is described in detail.

Texas: Development of a Statewide Scope and Sequence for Gifted Education

Simultaneous scenes unfolded in Texas 7 years ago. In the first scene, a roomful of professional gifted educators met to evaluate the products created by gifted students across the state for a pilot project called "Performance Standards." During the scoring process, educators determined that students required a deeper and richer background in research and thinking skills. When conversing with the students' teachers, these same teachers opined, "They [students] don't know how to do this." The outcome of the 3-day session was evidence of a variety of products from students whose program services may not have included a deep and rich curriculum.

The second scene involved a statewide meeting of gifted education consultants. The purpose of this meeting was to determine a method that could provide a consistently high level of teacher expertise in order to ensure rigor in curriculum and instruction. The outcome of this meeting was the seed for a statewide scope and sequence of skills and knowledge for gifted learners.

Educators' needs and the state's regional consultants' perspectives provided the support necessary for guidance through a scope and sequence. The regional consultants' experiences suggested that students would profit from this guidance. They believed that a consistency of skills and knowledge across the state would inform the efforts of educators as they prepared their students to work with the Texas Performance Standards Project (Texas Education Agency, 2006c).

To develop a statewide curricular framework for gifted education seemed like a lesson in futility. Just examine the "state" of the state—more than 1,100 independent school districts, all sizes and configurations; urban, suburban, and rural; all different in their approaches to gifted education; all focused on surviving a state/national mandate to raise performance levels of all students; and each district struggling with budget cuts and dwindling education dollars from state and national sources.

For years, the state of Texas had embraced and emphatically defended the state goal for gifted education:

Students who participate in services designed for gifted students will demonstrate skills in

- self-directed learning,
- thinking,

- research, and
- communication

as evidenced by the development of innovative products and performances that reflect individuality and creativity and are advanced in relation to students of similar age, experience, or environment.

High school graduates who have participated in services for gifted students will have produced products and performances of professional quality as part of their program services. (Texas Education Agency Division of Advanced Academic Services, 2000)

But by what standards would students' work be judged? What was the system for evaluating services for gifted students in the Texas public school systems? The answer came in 1999 when the Texas Legislature commissioned the Texas Education Agency (TEA) to develop performance standards by which districts (and the state) might assess how closely services for gifted students were aligned with the state goal.

Texas Performance Standards Project (TPSP)

The Texas Performance Standards Project (TPSP; see http://texaspsp.org/about.php) provides a structure for students to perform on assessment projects in grades 4 and 8 and again at the high school exit level. Projects reflect professional quality work by gifted students who are exiting the Texas K–12 public school system. Its foundation, content standards, is the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) for English language arts, mathematics, social studies, and science. Students who successfully complete a project demonstrate a deep understanding of at least one area of study in one of these disciplines.

Sample tasks have been developed for each of the core content areas that guide a new teacher or a teacher new to TPSP. Table 1 is a summary of a task in social studies for grade 4.

The TPSP presents statewide standards and an accompanying assessment system that captures the high levels of achievement expected of gifted and talented students. In addition to providing summative information on an individual student's learning, the results of this assessment can be used to improve a campus' or district's efforts to serve gifted and talented students. The TPSP scoring dimensions are the basis of the scoring scale. They represent a sample of the research skills that are important for gifted students to master. Scoring dimensions are provided for fourth grade, eighth grade, and exit-level projects. The complete scoring dimensions can be found online at http://www.texaspsp.org. The scoring dimensions relate to the exit level and capture the critical attributes of learning that gifted and talented students should achieve by the end of their K–12 public school experience (see Table 2). The dimensions incorporate the features of a variety of curricula while affording students opportunities to develop professional quality work.

The basis for scoring at the exit level includes three avenues:

- the final product: the tangible end result of the student's project that is of professional quality,
- process record: the documentation of the in-depth research investigation, and
- communication: the presentation of the final product and a question-and-answer session.

Teachers and students both need to understand what determines a high-end project. Therefore, it is important for teachers to review the scoring scale with students periodically as a formative assessment to provide a roadmap to a better end product.

At this time, participation in TPSP is optional for districts. The 20 Education Service Centers across the state are providing professional development in the process for all teachers interested in the project. Using the TPSP, a district may (a) assess district program goals and alignment, (b) assist teachers in assessing individual student performance, (c) identify gaps in services for gifted students, and (d) evaluate program needs related to professional development, resources, and instructional time on task.

Scope and Sequence

Districts that implemented the TPSP soon realized that the standards alone lacked the depth and breadth of skills required for development of rigorous content and relevant products. Educators and students sought direction in the form of a statewide scope and sequence of skills and knowledge to guide program development and revision.

Points for Consideration. Two guiding questions established common viewpoints in developing a scope and sequence.

1. What is the purpose of gifted and talented (G/T) program services?
2. What are the non-negotiables for the program?

Professional quality work is the expectation of G/T program services as evidenced in the *Texas State Plan for the Education of Gifted/Talented Students* (TEA Division of Advanced Academic Services, 2000) and TPSP. These expectations call for a curriculum that includes all of the skills and

Table 1
Grade 4 Social Studies

"We Are Texans" is a social studies unit that allows students to study the differences between their own communities and other communities, researching what it would be like to live in other places.

Description of Unit	This project generates a deeper understanding of population groups that have settled in Texas. Students can study immigrant groups of the past or contemporary immigrant groups. How did the geography of Texas affect the settlers' decisions to move here? What did geography have to do with their choices once they arrived? Students will understand how physical geography is vital to the decisions and choices people have made or will make. Additionally, students will learn concepts of cultural geography. What did population groups bring with them from their old homes? What contributions have they made to Texas? This project promotes understanding of others through the discovery of similarities and differences among population groups who come from various places around the globe to live in one place.
Phase I. Learning Experiences	This phase is teacher directed.
Phase II. Independent Research	This phase offers opportunities to learn about research, set up a research design, and conduct research for a student directed project.
A. Research Process	1. Selecting a group to study. Each student selects a cultural group that immigrated to Texas for independent research. 2. Asking guiding questions. Once students have identified their groups, each student should think of three to five guiding questions to explore.
B. The Product	Each student will create a museum display illustrating the contributions of the group of immigrants to Texas. The museum display should have at least 10 items in it, including, but not limited to, photographs, symbolic objects, audiotapes, videotapes, and documents.
C. Communication	Each student will assume the role of a docent who is explaining the display to a group of fourth graders who are visiting the museum. Students in the audience should have an opportunity to ask questions.

Note. Adapted from the Texas Performance Standards Project (http://www.texaspsp.org/about.php).

knowledge to aid students in reaching high levels of performance. One purpose of G/T services would be to provide the skills to be taught at the specific grade levels with content suggestions built around themes, topics, issues, or problems for each grade level. This specificity contributes to curriculum development and assures a continuum of program services. Common agreement supported that (a) both teachers and students will have goals and expectations, (b) student activities will be assessed, and (c) assessment will be based on statewide suggested standards, in this case the Texas Performance Standards Project (TSPS). The proposed scope and sequence is designed to include the skills, knowledge, and attitudes teachers need in order to help gifted students reach the state goal(s). This guide helps teachers evaluate the progress of their gifted students.

Development. Once parameters were set and the guiding questions clarified, the following steps were taken toward the development of a formal scope and sequence:

Step 1. Designing the course. A consultant for advanced academics from one of the 20 Education Service Centers (ESC) in Texas was selected to create the document with the assistance of professionals around the state as needed. A decision was made to develop a scope and sequence that would facilitate the TPSP. The consultant enlisted the help of a G/T specialist who had worked with the TPSP since its inception, developed the content, and relied on best practices that would facilitate the needs of students and teachers as they attempted the TPSP.

Step 2. Charting the course. The two consultants, along with the director of the statewide project, developed and edited the content and best practices over a 6-month period. A product was developed to match the needs of educators as they worked toward the fourth, eighth, and exit levels of the TPSP. Areas of expertise were designed in grade level blocks, grades K–4, 5–8, and 9–12. An appendix was added that defined the processes included in the skeletal scope and sequence (e.g., thinking skills, creative thinking process, research skills).

Table 2
Exit-Level Scoring Dimensions

Knowledge and skills	The sum of what has been learned, including new understandings and abilities, related to the topic of study. In this system, knowledge and skills are based on the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS).
Innovation and application	The creative use of knowledge and skills learned in the course of the project as demonstrated in the final product.
Analysis and synthesis	The thinking processes in which whole topics are separated into their constituent parts for study and reconstituted to form a new, coherent whole.
Ethics and unanswered questions	The development of a project in alignment with rules or standards of conduct governing the field of study. Additionally, this dimension considers the student's awareness and treatment of issues related to the study that lack a consensus among professionals in the field.
Multiple perspectives	The ability to examine an issue from more than one point of view, including the ability to separate one's own point of view from those of others.
Methodology and use of resources	The use of principles, procedures, practices, and references of the field of study to guide, but not limit, the project.
Communication	The use of written, spoken, and technological media to convey new learning.
Relevance and significance	The potential impact of the project on the individual student and other social groups, as well as the field of study.
Professional quality	The nature of the project that suggests that the skills and knowledge demonstrated in the product are comparable to those of a person engaged in the field of study as a livelihood.

Note. From the Texas Performance Standards Project (http://www.texaspsp.org/exit/scoringdimensions.php?p=1).

Step 3. Changing the course. After much thought, the developers realized that the work in the appendix of the document would serve as the scope and sequence. The product that defined needs across grade levels, the original "scope and sequence" ideas, would be the basis for future documents that could use the scope and sequence as a guide and could include specific grade-level examples for teachers.

Step 4. Completing the course. The project documents were turned over to the Statewide Initiatives Office, which worked closely with the Texas Education Agency to develop and deliver products for dissemination throughout the state. This office, using the content from the Scope and Sequence project, created the Gifted and Talented Teacher Toolkit (TEA, 2006a). This product is available through the Texas Education Agency, Advanced Academics, Gifted and Talented. The Table of Contents (see Figure 1) adds insight into its contents. Although it is not a traditional scope and sequence in form or substance, it provides the appropriate tools for each district, campus, and/or teacher who is ready to meet the challenges of teaching gifted children and youth.

Step 5. Designing a new course. The *Gifted and Talented Teacher Toolkit* (TEA, 2006a) is an important step forward for a statewide scope and sequence for Texas teachers of gifted students. It is not in scope and sequence form and is not intended to be a final product. Districts are the best judge of the timing and sequence of skills and knowledge while keeping in mind the requirements dictated by state standards.

Conclusion: Charting a New Course

The development of the Texas Performance Standards Project (TPSP) leading to the creation of the *Teacher Toolkit* (TEA, 2006a) was a product of several years of pilot projects. Input from students, parents, teachers, and administrators was solicited and sound research findings were infused into the final product. The toolkit may be accessed at http://www.texaspsp.org/toolkit/GT_Teacher_Toolkit.html. Students, parents, teachers, and administrators may retrieve any or all parts of the toolkit for personal and/or school use. Anecdotal comments assure the developers that the toolkit is a valuable means to build skills required for design and construction of relevant products.

A continuous work in progress, the *Gifted and Talented Teacher Toolkit* (TEA, 2006a) paired with the TPSP creates deep and rich curriculum opportunities for gifted students in Texas. Used together, these two pieces will direct future efforts toward a refinement of a scope and sequence that will provide quality services for gifted students whether they reside in a district with few or thousands of students. Currently, a *Gifted and Talented*

Teacher Toolkit II (TEA, 2006b) has been developed that provides an interactive curriculum evaluation process. The process allows districts to determine strengths and areas for improvement within their local program design, scope and sequence, and curriculum.

The Texas Education Agency provides the content for the Texas Performance Standards Project (TPSP) on its Web site (http://www.tea.state.tx.us/gted/GifTal.html).

Additional information about the Texas Performance Standards Project (TPSP) can be obtained by contacting Marilyn Peebles, Statewide Initiatives Office, Region 13 Education Service Center, marilyn.peebles@esc13txed.net; Jim Coffey, Advanced Academics Consultant, Region 15 Education Service Center, jim.coffey@netxv.net; and Doris Teague, Independent Consultant, doristeague@sbcglobal.net. They can offer insight into the original Scope and Sequence project and its outcome, the *Gifted and Talented Teacher Toolkit* (TEA, 2006a).

The following are resources referenced in the *Gifted and Talented Teacher Toolkit* (TEA, 2006a):

Tomlinson, C. A., Kaplan, S. N., Renzulli, J. S., Purcell, J., Leppien, J., & Burns, D. (2002). *The parallel curriculum: A design to develop high potential and challenge high-ability learners.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Winebrenner, S. (2001.) *Teaching gifted kids in the regular classroom.* Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit.

In addition to resources, the following Web sites support the Differentiating Instruction section of the *Gifted and Talented Teacher Toolkit* (TEA, 2006a):

1. Strategies for Powerful Teaching and Learning—What Differentiated Instruction Does and Does Not Look Like
   http://www.bham.wednet.edu/learning/SevenEssentialStrategies.htm
2. How to Adjust Teaching Styles to Learning Styles
   http://www.teachnet.org/ntol/howto/adjust
3. Multiple Menu Model of Differentiation
   http://www.gifted.uconn.edu/mmm/mmmart01.html
4. Layered Curriculum Sample Lessons—Across Grade Levels and Content Areas
   http://www.help4teachers.com/samples.htm
5. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development Resources for Differentiation
   http://www.ascd.org/portal/site/ascd/menuitem.e50c461dbbffeacbbfb3ffdb62108a0c
   (requires log-in)
6. University of Virginia's Differentiated Instruction Project
   http://curry.edschool.virginia.edu/hottlinx/index.htm
7. Four Ways to Differentiate Instruction
   http://members.shaw.ca/priscillatheroux/differentiating.html
8. Electronic Resources for Differentiating Instruction, including a compacting contract
   http://www.sde.com/Conferences/Differentiated-Instruction/DIResources.htm

- Learning Theory
- Bloom's Taxonomy
- Bruner's Discovery Learning
- Kaplan's Scholarly Behaviors
- Differentiated Instruction
- Content Knowledge
- Knowledge in Four Core Academic Areas: English Language Arts, Science, Social Studies, and Math
- Product Development
- Developing Advanced Products
- Oral Presentations
- Research Process
- Conducting Quantitative Research
- Conducting Qualitative Research
- Using Mixed Methods
- Basic Research Skills
- Models of Inquiry

Figure 1. Gifted and Talented Teacher Toolkit (TEA, 2006a) —Table of Contents.

Florida: Florida's Frameworks for Gifted Learners

Florida is very much district-driven in matters related to students who are gifted. Currently there are 67 school districts in the state of Florida, ranging in size from 1,066 to more than 362,000 pre-K–12 students. Although there is a state mandate that students who are eligible for gifted programs must be provided with service, it is the district's decision how that service will be provided. State Rule 6A-6.03019 defines students who are gifted based on superior intellectual development and capability of high performance and establishes criteria for eligibility for special instructional programs. In addition, districts have the option of developing an alternate plan for increasing the participation of students from underrepresented groups, defined as those from low socioeconomic status (SES) families or those with lim-

ited English proficiency (LEP). These alternate plans are referred to as Plan B although not every district has elected to develop a Plan B. Funding for service is provided through a lump sum allocation to the district for all exceptional education students and districts determine how funds should be allocated. Thus, service variations can be widely different.

When a parent considers moving to Florida and wants to know what service a child might receive, the answer varies depending on many factors. Typically, districts like the largest seven—serving more than one million students—offer more options for gifted services than the smallest seven districts that serve about 8,000 students combined. Also at issue is finding teachers who have the requisite state endorsement for working with gifted learners. A larger district may offer the courses for endorsement as part of its professional development at little or no cost to the teacher. A teacher in a small district may have to be willing to drive an hour or more to a site where the classes are offered. For the teacher in a smaller district who is meeting the needs of 35 students at five or more different K–12 schools, the task at hand is challenging. What does appropriate service really mean? What materials are provided by the district or the state that will guide differentiation appropriate for each student? Sometimes only one teacher is hired in the district and has no one to discuss concerns and materials or share best practices. In the larger districts a teacher may be the only teacher of the gifted at the school serving K–5 students for a few hours each week with the requirement to differentiate and ensure the students are mastering state standards. Where does the teacher turn for advice and support? With a huge array of published materials all claiming to have the very best strategies for meeting the needs of high-ability students, which are most likely to lead students to measurable success?

The Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) is part of the state's overall plan to increase student achievement by implementing higher standards. When a third grader evidences mastery of 75% of the third-grade Florida Sunshine State Standards, where does the teacher look for something more challenging? The FCAT, administered to students in grades 3–11, contains two basic components: criterion-referenced tests (CRT), measuring selected benchmarks in mathematics, reading, science, and writing from the Sunshine State Standards (SSS); and norm-referenced tests (NRT) in reading and mathematics, measuring individual student performance against national norms.

It is significant to note that in the fall of 2005, a new state law, State Rule 6A-6.030191, providing guidelines for development of an Educational Plan (EP) for students who are gifted, went into effect. Language in the law establishes that the team developing this plan must look at a variety of data about the child. The team is asked to establish the levels at which the child is currently performing and how that is documented. The team also is asked to consider the needs of the student to assure continued academic growth and establish how that will be documented and how and when progress toward the goals will be reported to parents. The next step is to determine what needs to happen to assure the success of goals that are measurable. A major question implied in this process is "How is this child gifted?"

Points for Consideration

Our key questions became:

1. What did teachers need to do to develop significant goals that were clearly stated and measurable?
2. What impact might this have on the many programs across the state where the focus was on enrichment? In other words, what should be taught and how and when?
3. What is the state's philosophy for gifted programs and what is the purpose for the service to be provided?
4. How might a framework act as a guide for teachers new to the field of gifted, as well as to those who had been teaching students who are gifted without these new guidelines? What, if any, changes might be implied?

Student Performance

Students identified as being eligible for gifted services were not always highly successful on the state FCAT tests, and, in fact, some of the third graders who scored below grade level in reading and were required to be retained had been identified as gifted. Why would these students be performing below grade level on these tests? Were they being taught test-taking skills? Was the curriculum they were offered significantly rigorous to help them maximize their potential? Were they making academic gains? How would we know?

Curriculum/Instruction

A statewide initiative to introduce teachers to the Parallel Curriculum model (Tomlinson et al., 2002) focused on having teachers look at adding rigor and relevance to the curriculum and provide meaningful differentiation for students. Although some teachers leaped at the chance to try new strategies, others saw no reason to change from what they were

already doing. Issues that arose among the cadre working with the Parallel Curriculum Model (PCM) centered on (1) how to help teachers see that students may already know much of the curriculum for the grade level, and (2) how to look at the curriculum in terms of ensuring that students had the necessary skills and knowledge for grasping the significant concepts, rather than facts about a topic. Because Florida is a highly transient state, how could we offer a guide that would provide some degree of consistency from one district to another?

Development

In a joint initiative between a state-funded project, Working on Gifted Issues (WOGI), and the state affiliate group, the Florida Association for Gifted Children (FLAG), a task force was formed and the development of the *Florida's Frameworks for K–12 Gifted Learners* (Weber et al, 2007) was begun. This task force was comprised of PCM cadre members, WOGI Project staff, current and former FLAG Board members, and Florida Department of Education staff. These developers were representative of urban districts, small and rural districts, and private schools. At the initial meeting, members agreed the task at hand seemed daunting.

Step 1. Identifying the Focus. Task force members discussed the work of two previous documents published by the Florida Department of Education, *GAGE: Greater Accountability in Gifted Education* (Florida Department of Education,1994) and *Blueprint: Organizing for Results* (Florida Department of Education, 1995) and the impact these documents had on the accountability of meeting gifted students' needs in the state of Florida. Additional guidelines in *Aiming for Excellence: Gifted Program Standards* (Landrum, Callahan, & Shaklee, 2001) published by the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) were also considered in the development of the frameworks.

With Daggett's (2005) words about achieving academic excellence through rigor and relevance by interrelating and reinforcing curriculum, instruction, and assessment in mind, the task force met to identify the focus, discuss the process, and agree upon the format. External evaluators provided reviews of the document as it progressed and then again when it was completed.

Step 2. Developing and Refining the Document. Seven curricular goals were identified and the agreed-upon format consisted of a rubric with traits and indicators specific to the goals and their objectives. The rubrics present a four-tiered scale for measuring student outcomes within the particular trait for each objective. Although not grade or subject specific, the rubric encourages the teacher to assess overall growth on a continuum that begins with *know*, and leads to *understand, perform,* and *accomplish* (see Table 3).

Discussions were lengthy and intense, often requiring task force members to reevaluate their understanding of differentiated curriculum for gifted learners. At the same time, task force members were asked to contribute their ideas in a scope broad enough to encompass the needs of K–12 learners. The goal of the *Florida's Frameworks for K–12 Gifted Learners* (Weber et al., 2007) is to provide guidelines that support a challenging and rigorous curriculum that enhances the Florida Sunshine State Standards in order to meet the needs of gifted students. The document is intended to assist educators as they plan outcomes appropriate for gifted learners, as well as provide a means for sharing with administrators the goals for program services and helping students and parents see the larger picture of the intent of the services.

The frameworks' refinement began at a statewide meeting by asking district coordinators of programs for gifted learners to provide input about the document's content. Fellow coordinators reacted to questions including: How does the goal reflect a central need of gifted learners? How adequately do the objectives address the nature of the goal? How successfully do the traits comprise the breadth of the objectives? Is there progression from one level to the next? Is it clear and reflective of increasing complexity?

The resulting document (Weber et al., 2007) focused on a Table of Contents that includes the following components:

- Preface
- Rationale/Mission Statement
- Suggested Use of *Florida's Frameworks for K–12 Gifted Learners*
- Student Outcomes—Frameworks' Goals and Objectives
- Interpreting the Rubrics
- Program Goals
- Visualizing the Goals
- Supporting Materials
- Glossary
- Bibliography

The program goals support the components of curriculum: content, process, affect, and product. The program goals include both an expository explanation and a set of rubrics to assist in the understanding and assessment of the objectives. The rubrics present a four-tiered scale for measuring student outcomes within the particular trait for each objective. This scale, *Know, Understand, Perform,* and *Accomplish*, qualitatively describes the behaviors and attitudes that can be assessed in students (see Table 3).

Table 3
Rubric
Goal 1 Objective 1

OBJECTIVE 1: The student will locate, define, and organize a field of study as it relates to the broad spectrum of knowledge				
TRAIT	KNOW	UNDERSTAND	PERFORM	ACCOMPLISH
Nature of Knowledge	Locates and lists the general divisions of knowledge, i.e., art, science, humanities, etc., and recognizes integrated fields and disciplines	Identifies and defines a field of interest and analyzes how the field is organized by explaining what criteria define the discipline and how those criteria are organized and divided	Differentiates fact, concept, theory, and principle and employs each in developing meaning and knowledge	Constructs own meaning within a chosen field and makes new contributions to this respective field of study
Basic Research	Identifies and locates basic reference sources that support general research in several disciplines	Analyzes the relevance and usefulness of primary and secondary references while identifying how fields are organized and subdivided	Uses multiple primary and secondary sources to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate relevant persons, places, events, or beliefs that are dominant in a field	Uses a variety of professional journals, professional databases, and college textbooks to make connections between and among fields of discipline
Manipulation of Data	Manipulates data in order to determine contributions of the discipline to the community and world	Seeks connections between fields to make sense of patterns and trends	Poses research questions that help interpret the effects of major trends and issues over time	Develops themes and connections across historical events, periods, and fields
Organization of Data	Creates or selects an existing system for organizing data in a sequence	Constructs an organizational system (i.e., knowledge tree, graphic organizer, or diagram) that represents and illustrates the organization in a field of study and the subdivisions within that field	Identifies and illustrates themes, patterns, and structures that define an area of study	Challenges accepted bodies of knowledge and organizational methodologies

Note. From *Florida's Frameworks for K–12 Gifted Learners* (p. 11), by C. L. Weber et al., 2007. Tallahassee, FL: Florida Department of Education.

The goals identified are as follows:

By graduation, the student identified as gifted will be able to:

- critically examine the complexity of knowledge: the location, definition, and organization of a variety of fields of knowledge;
- create, adapt, and assess multifaceted questions in a variety of fields/disciplines;
- conduct thoughtful research/exploration in multiple fields;
- think creatively and critically to identify and solve real-world problems;
- assume leadership and participatory roles in both gifted and heterogeneous group learning situations,
- set and achieve personal, academic, and career goals; and
- develop and deliver a variety of authentic products/performances that demonstrate understanding in multiple fields/disciplines. (Weber et al., 2007, pp. 7–8)

Step 3. Implementing the Document. Before the document is disseminated to school districts the developers have considered the next step, "How do we support the coordinators and teachers as they begin using the frameworks with their students?" Answering this question is key to successfully imple-

menting the frameworks. An additional concern raised by coordinators of gifted programs focuses on referencing the goals and objectives within student EP plans. Although the state endorsement courses provide the vehicle for introducing the rigorous outcomes to teachers interested in working with gifted learners, additional professional development and support must be provided. Task force members have indicated a commitment to providing such support in the form of in-service training as the document is made available. Coordinators of gifted programs were provided an opportunity to work directly with the authors, participate in discussions, and help troubleshoot potential problems and provide possible solutions during a summer professional development opportunity. A link to a video of the frameworks, with an overview of its seven goals, objectives, and rubrics, and presented by the developers of the product currently is available at the WOGI Web site (http://www.unfwogi.com). Technical support to coordinators also will be provided at regional meetings during the following year.

Information about the *Florida's Frameworks for K–12 Gifted Learners* (Weber et al, 2007) can be found at WOGI Web site.

The following major resources are referenced in the *Florida's Frameworks for K–12 Gifted Learners* (Weber et al., 2007):

Daggett, W. R. (2005). Achieving academic excellence through rigor and relevance. Retrieved May 12, 2007, from http://www.daggett.com/pdf/Academic_Excellence.pdf

Florida Department of Education. (1994). *GAGE: Greater accountability in gifted education*. Tallahassee, FL: Author.

Florida Department of Education. (1995). *Blueprint: Organizing for results.* Tallahassee, FL: Author.

Landrum, M. S., Callahan, C. M., & Shaklee, B. D. (Eds.). (2001). *Aiming for excellence: Gifted program standards.* Waco, TX: Prufrock Press.

Implications

We now understand that curriculum reform not only requires input from all facets of the education community, but also must have the endorsement of the state department of education. To ensure that the work reaches its intended audience and that it fulfills its potential, the support of the state department is vital. Whether such a project is initiated by the state or given the state department's stamp of approval, the backing by the local educators who develop policies and ensure their distribution and enforcement is another essential element for any model or framework. In Florida, the *Frameworks* (Weber et al., 2007) was a product requested by the state. The Florida Department of Education worked through WOGI to fund the initiative so that a high-quality and practical document could be produced. Development of the frameworks would assure some consistency among all educators working with gifted students and provide a meaningful way to track progress. Currently, Florida is looking ahead to the development of measurable student goals and objectives aligning with the frameworks in student education plans. Guidance to school districts will be provided through the WOGI Project. In Texas, the Texas Education Agency funded a broader project, yet accepted the need for development of specific components that could facilitate and enhance both past and future efforts related to gifted education in the state. Other products, commercial and state-developed, may provide guidance for educators as does TPSP. The Gifted and Talented Teacher Toolkit (TEA, 2006a) is also rich in content with related links that offer a wide spectrum of support for teachers and students.

It is important that parents and teachers understand the impact of these products. The goal of the Gifted and Talented Teacher Toolkit (TEA, 2006a) is to provide a guide for teachers and parents of the gifted emphasizing thinking and research skills beyond those required in the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). This toolkit supports TPSP by making available to students, parents, and teachers accessible resources and rich content to develop products that reflect the state goal: Development of "products or performances of professional quality." As the pilots sites have evolved, levels of expertise of the students, as well as the number of students completing a project, have increased. The addition of the Gifted and Talented Teacher Toolkit (TEA, 2006a) has made a qualitative difference in the products submitted at the regional and state level. Their impact in the differentiated classroom has not been measured, but teachers informally report that the Gifted and Talented Teacher Toolkit (TEA, 2006a) has been a welcome addition to their teaching arsenal and a means for enhancing students' research. Whether the tool is used to formally develop learning and products through TPSP or through regular differentiated instruction, early responses indicate that its impact is observable.

The goal for *Florida's Frameworks for K–12 Gifted Learners* (Weber et al, 2007) is that educators who work with gifted students will be better able to identify where a student is currently performing and thus set a path for continued growth in any content area. With a focus on assessment and

accountability, the frameworks encourage teachers to continue to teach meaningful content, while working towards gains in the seven goal areas. A student at any grade level may be performing at any level from novice to expert in any of the goal areas and the educator will be able to pinpoint essential strategies for growth. As a result, parent, teachers, and administrators will more readily be able to follow the direction of the gifted service and track what is happening during such services. Surveying teachers and administrators will provide additional data about the usefulness of the frameworks and its impact on instruction and student achievement.

In essence, when comparing the two products, the Gifted and Talented Teacher Toolkit (TEA, 2006a) is designed as a foundation for curriculum. The curriculum may be TPSP or locally developed to meet the state goal. If it is used with TPSP, benchmarks come with the end product. The toolkit does not provide measures to determine current performance or student growth as do the seven goal areas with objectives and rubrics in *Florida's Frameworks for K–12 Gifted Learners* (Weber et al., 2007). Florida's frameworks center on how to help teachers see that students already may have mastered much of the curriculum for the grade level, and how to look at the curriculum in terms of ensuring that students have the necessary skills and knowledge for grasping the significant concepts, rather than facts about a topic. Texas' work centers on resources to accomplish the state goal.

Other comparisons reinforce the differences between the two state products. *Florida's Frameworks for K–12 Gifted Learners* (Weber et al., 2007) is more specific in instruction, whereas Texas' *Gifted and Talented Teacher Toolkit* (TEA, 2006a) is more specific in foundational skills. For example, Florida's seven goals include rubrics that present a four-tiered scale for measuring student outcomes within the particular trait for each objective. Although not grade or subject specific, the rubric encourages the teacher to assess overall growth on a continuum that begins with *know*, and leading to *understand, perform*, and *accomplish*. Texas' *Gifted and Talented Teacher Toolkit* (TEA, 2006a) provides foundational skills that must be preassessed by the teacher, but offers no preassessment or final assessment tools. There is no continuum of learning attached to the toolkit. Texas could consider a similar document like *Florida's Frameworks* (Weber et al., 2007) as the next step in their process that would facilitate both the *Gifted and Talented Teacher Toolkit* (TEA, 2006a) and the *Gifted and Talented Teacher Toolkit II* (TEA, 2006b; curriculum evaluation). Conversely, Florida could suggest the use of the Texas toolkit to its teachers who are seeking ways to implement skills found in the rubrics.

In addition to the comparisons above, the Florida *Frameworks* (Weber et al., 2007) are specific in how the seven goals are accomplished. The Texas Performance Standards Project's goals, supported by *Gifted and Talented Teacher Toolkit* (TEA, 2006a), are inherent in intent, but not specific. For example, the list provided by *Florida's Frameworks* (Weber et al., 2007) that identifies goals for students by graduation are similar to the *Texas State Plan for the Education of Gifted/Talented Students* (TEA Division of Advanced Academic Services, 2000), but the Texas goals are less concrete and more abstract.

Both states are concerned about support of the teachers in their efforts toward student learning and student growth. Florida asks, "How do we support the coordinators and teachers as they begin using the frameworks with their students?" Texas, too, is concerned with this aspect. In Texas, the 20 Education Service Centers (ESC) scattered across the state have taken on the responsibility of information about and professional development with the *Gifted and Talented Teacher Toolkit* (TEA, 2006a), TPSP, and *Gifted and Talented Teacher Toolkit II* (TEA, 2006b). As liaisons between the state agency and local school districts, consultants in the ESCs provide support to those districts that ask for their training and support. In Florida, Task Force members and coordinators of gifted programs have taken on that responsibility.

Both states agree that developing outcomes for gifted learners is not a process that can be rushed. It is important to allow time for discourse and an understanding of what is to be accomplished. Leadership is crucial as it provides the structure needed to make decisions, stay focused, and keep the project moving. The makeup of the committees provides a level of accountability to colleagues in the field and representation from various settings with different philosophies is vital to the success of the project. Although disagreements about specific concepts or their definitions occurred, consensus resulted through discussion. All agree that the need for greater accountability in our gifted programs and documents that would guide administrators, coordinators, and teachers in reaching that goal were needed. We are very much aware of the impact such documents may have on what constitutes appropriate services for gifted learners and as a result hope to raise the level of accountability in our programs. The monitoring of such accountability continues to provide a challenge, but it is a challenge that has been embraced by both states.

In conclusion, it was helpful, as the state of Florida found, to have the assis-

tance and support of educators from a state with similar demographics and concerns, which had completed a similar product and could provide guidance for what worked, what didn't and what would be changed if they were to do it over. Although Florida walked in Texas' footsteps, their paths were separate and distinct. Each path offers direction for other states as they too, strive to improve and enhance accountability of services for gifted learners. GCT

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can one go higher? (By the way, the comparator in the formulas for Value Added Assessment is either grade level or age, which leads to very intriguing questions regarding AYP accelerants).

This special issue on standards has been difficult to compile. Few are interested in submitting work related to such an overwhelming topic, without sounding either "anti-education" or being received as having "sold out" to the system. Fortunately, we have a core of authors up for the challenge.

Milner, Tenore, and Laughter discuss strategies teacher education programs (and teacher educators) should use to familiarize teaching candidates with the unique needs of high-achieving, culturally diverse male students. Their suggestions offer an intriguing focal point for discussions about how to provide a "best" experience for helping teacher candidates realize the varied, dense, and diverse needs of the broad population of students they will be expected to address in their developing practice.

Sondergeld and Schultz describe curricular work that provides all children in a mixed-ability science classroom to have a sense of hope, wonder, and challenge in their learning lives. Suggestions are provided for teachers to assist in tackling differentiation to provide a flexible educational environment that meets varied learner needs.

Rakow provides a way to turn standards "inside out" (my words) to provide gifted learners with the space to explore broad and complex issues. The level of curricular focus, Rakow contends, should be closer to the daily or weekly level rather than pegged to the requisite standards and dates of the assessment tests.

Weber, Boswell, and Smith discuss the process of curricular change (what we commonly associate with reform) in Texas and Florida as both states grappled with the emphasis on performance and proficiency standards for gifted learners. This compare/contrast article is valuable when considering implications educators face as political climates shift around standards (specifically the aforementioned subspecies of achievement standards) and assessment.

After reading the articles in this special issue, I charge you to think closer about how standards are being interpreted and used in schools. Historically, they have not been written for a specific group of students other than as diagnostic tools; yet, current practices seem to be leading toward sets of standards that might be used in the near future on gifted learners as means of comparing and contrasting performance (perhaps even giftedness as a construct). As teachers, it is time we begin to look closer at the intent of accountability and standards-based reform in America and provide our voice to the discussion. GCT

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