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Press Release: Elimination of Gifted Position at TN Department of Education

Dear Governor Lee, Commissioner Schwinn , Members of the State Legislature, and fellow Tennesseans,

The Tennessee Association for the Gifted has great concern about the state of gifted education and support for these unique students in our state. Without notice or comment, the Tennessee Department of Education eliminated the position of Gifted Specialist and supposedly assigned the duties to two other positions which were already established. We are asking that the position be reinstated and a qualified professional be found to hold this position to continue the vital work started. This position is needed as currently there is no one, to our knowledge, who has a gifted educator endorsement in the TN Department of Education.

The current plan as defended by the TN Department of Education is to divide the responsibilities previously held by the gifted specialist between two current positions who already have other full time responsibilities- identification (school psychologist) and intervention. In recent weeks, after we began questioning the change, we have noticed that the Department's official chart and correspondence have changed the second position's description from interventions alone to include interventions and enrichment. In fact, this change highlights the lack of understanding in what gifted education truly means in Tennessee as it is not a program nor is it merely enrichment. Tennessee gifted students are served through individualized education plans which may contain enrichment opportunities but are so much more complex. Furthermore, it also shows a lack of importance that a previously full time position with full time responsibilities could be absorbed into the duties of two other full time positions without something being lost.

We need a voice for our students and families at the Department of Education, especially at a time when the focus is on the deficits of students due to COVID. Our gifted students need a voice to ensure that they are served and not lost. In fact, for some of our gifted students the gap between our gifted learners and others may be greater now than in the past. Not addressing their needs can lead to consequences beyond just lack of growth including underachievement, social emotional issues, and behavioral issues.

We have already been concerned with a lack of equitable opportunities in the state of Tennessee depending upon a student's geographic location. The inconsistency between districts in providing services, opportunities for teacher support and training, and the education of parents related to legal rights for identification and services for their children are also concerning to us. The previous gifted specialist was working on these issues as well as many others.

These students are our future leaders, innovators, entrepreneurs, scientists, and so much more. We need this position to be reinstated and filled as soon as possible with a qualified individual. We need a contact at the TN Department of Education for our gifted supervisors, gifted teachers, parents, and students to help Tennessee move forward by insuring our gifted students are provided with equal opportunities to reach their potential

Tennessee Association for the Gifted Board of Directors  
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