

Joint Committee on Education

**March 11, 2015, Public Hearing on Senate Bill 1055:
AN ACT CONCERNING GIFTED AND TALENTED STUDENTS**

Testimony by Bianka Kortlan-Cox
Connecticut Association for the Gifted (CAG)

Co-Chairs, Ranking Members, and Members of the Education,

My Name is Bianka Kortlan-Cox and I'm an Immediate Past President of the Connecticut Association for the Gifted, and currently VP of Legislation and Public Policy. I am writing in support of Raised Bill 1055, and would urge you to vote yes on this important piece of legislation. SDE's oversight of the existing law mandating identification of gifted and talented students would be especially of great help to youngsters residing in underserved communities of our state. Currently, over 30% of Connecticut's school districts do not comply with the state law (I refer to the testimony of CAG's Executive Director and a data document attached to it) and do NOT identify ANY gifted students in their schools. Are we to believe that in under-funded schools there are no gifted and talented children?

In my comments I would like to focus on two issues which seemed to be of special interest during the Hearing, and possibly were not yet fully addressed. First, the issue of social-emotional development of gifted and talented students is an often misunderstood and overlooked aspect of these children's development, and yet it really is key to understanding the nature of all their special needs. Perhaps the most easily noticed characteristic of these children is their asynchronous development of their cognitive, emotional and physical maturity. One definition of giftedness states that:

"giftedness is asynchronous development in which advanced cognitive abilities and heightened intensity combine to create inner experiences and awareness that are qualitatively different from the norm. This asynchrony increases with higher intellectual capacity. The uniqueness of the gifted renders them particularly vulnerable and requires modifications in parenting, teaching and counseling in order for them to develop optimally." The Columbus Group study, 1991.

In school these students may be extremely advanced in one area of study and trailing behind in another, and while perhaps being the most physically developed kids in the class they may be emotionally immature for their age. Another easily noticeable characteristic may be their intensity: intensity of focus on a topic, inability to disengage from a discussion when others have finished talking, or intense pursuit of something they may currently be interested in. Higher level of self-criticism often prevents these kids from turning their homework on time, or participating in a discussion because they may think "others have already said everything I wanted to say". This characteristic combined with their high expectations of themselves and others, as well as often significant oversensitivity to criticism and peer rejection, often leads these kids to early depression, while at the same time they may be acting intolerant, perfectionistic and bossy. In the classroom, these inventive children with generally very high energy levels may seem disruptive, out of step, stubborn and manipulative. Often just a simple awareness of gifted and Talented students' social-emotional characteristics can be helpful to teachers, as they try to properly meet these students academic needs.

I would also like to address the issue we call Twice Exceptionality. During the March 11th Hearing on bills focused on special education concerns, among them dyslexia, it was easy to notice a common thread in recommendations presented by the many testifying experts: early identification, followed by an evidence-based and need-targeted intervention is ALWAYS key to ensuring that we as a state do our best in

providing “suitable educational experience” to all students entrusted by parents to our schools’ care.

Who are Twice Exceptional (2E) students? According to the “Twice Exceptional Dilemma” guide issued in 2006 by the National Education Association (NEA): *“Twice-exceptional students have a wide range of disabilities and demonstrable giftedness as they share characteristics of both areas of exceptionality. It is important for educators to recognize that extremes of ability can exist within any one student; students can have disabilities and still be considered gifted.”*

Sally Reis, one of our preeminent experts in Gifted and Talented education at the National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented at UConn, said that *“identifying 2E children is very hard because they look to the rest of the world like average achievers. Their superior giftedness may be compensating for and masking their learning disability”*. At the same time, their disability may be masking their giftedness.

Let me close with a comment from another preeminent expert in Gifted and Talented education, Joyce VanTassel-Baska, who said *“Some of our most brilliant contributors to society may be found among this [2E] population, including Stephen Hawking, Einstein, and Edison.*

Providing support for individual differences in all classroom settings is a goal of our national organizations..”

In conclusion, I urge you to pass S.B. 1055.

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