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Policy & Curriculum

**Will Gifted Education Weather the Common Core?**

* By Dian Schaffhauser
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According to a study by the [Fordham Institute](http://edexcellence.net/), education reform "gadfly," some districts and states believe that the Common Core gives them a reason to "ditch" services for gifted students, equating the standards with advanced education.

"The Common Core was really meant to be a floor and not a ceiling," said Jonathan Plucker, a professor of education at the [University of Connecticut](http://uconn.edu/) and an expert in gifted education, who wrote the [Fordham paper examining the situation for high-achieving students](http://edex.s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/Common%20Core%20and%20America%27s%20High-Achieving%20Students_FINAL.pdf).

According to his findings, the existence of the learning standards is being used "in some places" to justify reducing or scrapping gifted education services "on grounds that the new universal standards are more challenging than what came before them."

Plucker's report cites several specific scenarios, such as a Mississippi district school board president who told a local paper that the Common Core would cost close to a million dollars to implement, and that's where funding would have to go -- forcing the closure of gifted classes starting in the 2014-2015 school year. An Illinois district eliminated gifted education programming by pointing to the rigorous standards of the Common Core.

After a talk in November at a conference, Plucker noted, "We were overwhelmed by the number of teachers who came up afterward and said, 'We're having this exact same discussion in my school. We're getting rid of ability grouping, of AP classes....' That is worrisome, to say the least."

As antidote, Plucker offered two recommendations, both intended to "emphasize the importance of advanced achievement" in school policies and actions.

First, he said, "We have to get better at instructional and curricular differentiation." Noting that differentiation is a topic that's been around for "30 years," teachers need more extensive professional development specifically "devoted to curricular and instructional differentiation by ability level." They also need time to "plan together" in order to meet the needs of their high-ability learners.

Second, state and local education leaders need to eliminate policies that limit the learning done by advanced students. As an example, Plucker referenced policies that prevent advanced students who have moved into college early from receiving a high school diploma if they haven't earned the appropriate number of high school credits; or rules that tie kindergarten entrance strictly to age rather than readiness.

Such policies, he said, are there "for the right reasons" but have "unintended consequences" of "not allowing students to move through schools at their own pace."

"American education is in the midst of a generations-long transition from age-based and one-size-fits-all education to highly individualized and differentiated learning—an approach that addresses students' unique needs and development," Plucker concluded. By tapping their expertise in delivering differentiated instruction, "Educators of high-ability students have an important role to play in ensuring this journey is successful."

The [paper is available](http://edex.s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/Common%20Core%20and%20America's%20High-Achieving%20Students_FINAL.pdf) [for download](http://edex.s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/Common%20Core%20and%20America%27s%20High-Achieving%20Students_FINAL.pdf) from the Fordham site.

A [recorded webinar](http://edexcellence.net/events/can-gifted-education-survive-the-common-core) that features Plucker is available online.

About the Author

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