

KeyOpinion



When Ugly Children, Gifted Students and Dumbed-Down Schools Collide

Critics call the gifted program 'elitist.' That complaint is bizarre and strangely unintelligent.

Florida lawmakers are hardly an attractive bunch. Their personalities are sometimes less than magnetic. And they hardly spark inspiration just from their appearance in a room. That's why they have to play politics at all times - translation: give the people what they want.

News reports throughout the state have spelled out their latest effort to be popular by lowering the bar for students in our public schools to gain entrance into the gifted program. Currently, it takes a 130 IQ to be considered gifted; the legislators suggest a 120 minimum score would be fairer.

One could argue there are two fundamentals in public education: shortage of money and shortage of intelligence. Statistically only 3% of school children exceed the 130 IQ, which allows entrance into the gifted program. Schools, and the gifted program, which costs about \$2,000 per student more than a non-gifted counterpart, are currently under-funded and filled to capacity. If the bar is lowered to the 120 IQ mark, the number of qualified gifted students soars to 7% of the entire school population. The legislators have no idea how to fund the current classroom-size mandates, let alone a plethora of new "gifted" students.

The Dysfunctional Classroom

And why have a gifted program anyway? Why can't these kids be thrown into the blender of the regular classroom, like one more ingredient in a gazpacho?

Mainly for this reason: Any extreme in behavior or intelligence demands extra time and effort from the teacher. It is obvious educators cannot focus on everybody in the classroom — especially when extremes are present — whether gifted or handicapped. If there are exceptionally slow students, the rest will twiddle away in a devilish workshop of boredom. If the teacher pays attention solely to the smartest kids, then the material becomes inaccessible.

When teachers have to do more than just educate; if they must play parent, security officer or psychologist, no one else learns a thing. We cannot keep asking more and more from our teachers.

The lawmakers seem to forget why the gifted programs were created in the first place. The gifted children were born able to grasp concepts and ideas at a rate far beyond your average student. But, of course, politics has a way of leveling all playing fields.

A few years ago, minority and poor students were eligible for gifted status even if their IQ scores was equivalent to 120. It took a sober judge to rule that disparity unconstitutional. A non-minority child with a 128 IQ could not gain entrance to the program, but a minority child with eight points less could be allowed into the program because of his skin color or economic status. Not exactly a way to help race relations in America.

Gifted at any Cost

Critics call the gifted programs 'elitist.' That complaint is bizarre and strangely unintelligent. Should we then label the mentally challenged program 'dumbing down?'



Steve Reid
Editor & Publisher

The idea is that these children, whether one extreme or the other, are out of the 'average' range of intelligence. The essence of a gifted program is to bring together the elite intellects within the student body.

It is true in musicianship and in writing, and in any art or sport — you can only compensate so much and practice so much for a lack of natural ability. In cold terms, if your child is or is not gifted, deal with it, but please do not demand that the bar be lowered.

What these legislators ought to do is find out how to inspire each student no matter what level their intelligence, to their greatest potential. They should make education across the board a priority, and not appease every squeaky wheel that demands their child is entitled to something they haven't really earned.

The Madness Continues

There is another warm, fuzzy idea of overprotectiveness being bandied about by our administrators. They say, "Stop posting names of honor roll students, because it may make the children who didn't make honor roll feel badly."

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Britney Eyes Longboat Getaway

SOLD!

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has learned that Britney remains fond of Sarasota, where her name was the most popular of new Sarasota new-borns in 2001. Unable to get her husband to vacation here while married, Britney may come herself.

The Chamber of Commerce refuses to confirm local gossip that Britney will stay at a Longboat hotel/spa. Many private homes on Longboat should be open to her. We hope she has a wonderful, calming rest in our peaceful paradise.

Segolene Royal Not Welcome on Longboat

In her historic run for the French presidency, Socialist Minister Segolene Royal has ruffled many feathers. Many have been put off by her four children, born out of wedlock with her decades long partner, Socialist Party chief Francois Hollande. Yet her most recent opposition comes from political figures on Longboat Key.

"We don't want her coming her. Not with what she supports," one local politician told Sold! "She can go to Martinique if she wants to see the beach."

The frosty response comes to Royal's proposal to tax dwellings that are unoccupied for two years or more.

Besides a tax on unused dwellings in high density locations, Royal is advocating that unused apartments and houses be allocated to France's burgeoning homeless population.

Many Parisians have recently protested homelessness by staying a night or two in tents set up by the Seine. They argue in a nation as rich as France, everyone should have a safe place to live.

Opposition has been the rule on Longboat. Michael Saunders has, however, so far not joined in that stance (does this mean the International Division is considering offerings in the French Caribbean?) A typical response was voiced by one former town official. "How do you determine a dwelling is unoccupied? What if the servants sometimes stay there? What if the owners keep the place up and pay their taxes promptly?"

The homeless are not expected to invade Longboat anytime in the foreseeable future. With many Longboat residences fourth or fifth homes, sometimes occupied for less than a month per year, Royal's stance still seems to have touched a nerve.

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