



## **The Value of Local AIG Plans: A Tale of Xanadu**

By Kristen R. Stephens, Ph.D.

For those of you who were around in the 1980s, Xanadu is a musical romance film starring Olivia Newton-John. For literary buffs, words of a poem written by an opium-induced Samuel Taylor Coleridge might come to mind, and if history is your passion, you may recognize Xanadu as the name of a former city located in central Mongolia. Whatever image Xanadu conveys, the term has become a metaphor for opulence. So, it is only fitting during this time of economic uncertainty, that we dream of and imagine the opulent school district of Xanadu.

Xanadu District has an average daily membership (ADM) of 20,000 students. Approximately 2,200 (11%) of these students are identified as gifted. Since state funds for academically gifted children remained untouched for this budget cycle, Xanadu will receive an allocation of \$1,163.07 per child based on 4% of its 2009-2010 allocated ADM. In other words, 4% of Xanadu's ADM is 800; therefore the district will receive \$930,456 ( $\$1,163.07 \times 800$ ) for its academically gifted programs.

Dr. Greenwald is the superintendent of Xanadu. In the midst of the current economic downturn and the approval of the new state budget with nearly \$350 million less for public schools than in the previous year, she is forced to make some tough choices regarding how to best use her district's monies. With the \$930,456 received from the state for the district's academically gifted programs, Dr. Greenwald decides to transfer approximately \$46,500 of this money, which had formerly been used to fund a gifted education coordinator's position at the district level, for use towards materials and teaching training in a reading intervention method in an attempt to improve the performance of Level I and II readers (as measured by the End-of-Grade Reading Comprehension Test). This change in resource allocation would effectively eliminate the gifted coordinator's position within the district.

Having heard of Dr. Greenwald's intentions, a concerned parent asked to see a copy of Xanadu's plan for gifted education that was approved by the local school board in 2006. After reviewing the plan, the parent realizes that the absence of a district coordinator to oversee gifted programs and services would prohibit the plan from adequately being implemented. For example, the plan delineated specific, important responsibilities for the coordinator—including, but not limited to:

- overseeing the implementation and accountability of the local gifted education plan,
- supervising screening and identification activities in the schools,
- supervising the development of differentiated curriculum for the gifted education program,
- evaluating the effectiveness and appropriateness of gifted education services,
- developing and maintaining communication with parents, and
- building communications with area institutions of higher learning to provide appropriate acceleration and concurrent enrollment opportunities.

If this full-time position were to be eliminated, how and by whom would these responsibilities be performed? Since the plan was approved by the local school board, Dr. Greenwald cannot unilaterally make changes to the plan without the board's prior approval. Furthermore, transferring funds allocated for academically or intellectually gifted students *cannot* occur if it will impact services to gifted children, and the act of eliminating the coordinator of gifted programs for the district could certainly prevent gifted students within the system from receiving appropriate services, as there would no longer be anyone monitoring or growing the program at the district level.

Why do I share the story of Xanadu? Because it is important for advocates of gifted children to familiarize themselves with their local gifted education plans and to understand that any proposed changes to gifted education programs and services that contradict this plan, must first be considered and approved by the local school board. And, while the transfer of gifted education funds for other purposes may be allowable, it cannot impact the mandated services provided to such students.

Local plans are developed, approved by local school boards, and submitted to the NC Department of Public Instruction every three years. Many of you are probably active participants during the renewal/revision cycle; however, it is imperative that we not rest on our laurels during the years in-between. Local plans need to be carefully monitored to ensure that reality (what is actually being implemented) aligns with what is stated on paper (the local gifted plan).

With the approval of the new Academically/Intellectually Gifted Education Program Standards by the State Board of Education in July 2009, the state now has a viable means for evaluating gifted education programs statewide, and districts will be held more accountable for actually ensuring that their plans are implemented as intended, that gifted students are receiving the services they need, and progress towards established program goals are being made.

So, find your local gifted education plan. Read it. Ask questions, and educate others regarding the plan's significance. Remember, the local gifted education plan is an important document required by state law (**Article 9B; N.C.G.S. § 115C-150.5**) and approved by your local school board that delineates how gifted students will be identified and served within your district. North Carolina is fortunate to have such a mandate that requires school systems to contemplate and address the needs of the gifted learners—many states aren't so fortunate. I guess in this regard, we are *opulent*.

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