

Arkansas Gifted Education: The Legislative Foundation

In 1979, a small but committed group of parents, educators and legislators led by Martha Ann Jones, embarked on a challenging journey. Through their collaborative efforts, these pioneers created a legislative platform that served as the foundation of one of the country's most successful state educational initiatives, providing statewide services to identified gifted and talented students in every public school in Arkansas. More than twenty-five acts include different references and statutory notations related to gifted education. The laws cited below are considered foundational in the establishment and development of gifted and talented educational opportunities for Arkansas students. It is the intent of this document to solidify the legacy of these visionaries and provide the AGATE membership an understanding of the legislative foundation for advocacy on behalf of the gifted and talented students in our state.

Laws and Historical Context	Outcomes for GT Students
1979 – Act 106 – Provided legal authority to “each school district” to determine eligibility requirements for GT programs. Established the first Advisory Council for the Education of Gifted and Talented Children. Created the Arkansas Department of Education Office of Gifted and Talented to be directed by a qualified administrator. Set up the original process for local funding for gifted education services linked to an application process in which the district met established guidelines and reported annually to the ADE. Also established a framework for the first Arkansas Governor’s School.	School districts were required to provide programs that specifically addressed the cognitive and affective needs of gifted and talented students. A structure for funding the programs and accountability for their quality was established. Governor Bill Clinton’s dream of an Arkansas Governor’s School was realized.
1983 – Act 3 - (Academic Enrichment for Gifted in Summer – AEGIS Programs) – Established a grant process to provide summer residential and day enrichment programs for high school gifted and talented students who demonstrated exceptional abilities in specific subject areas. Provided for the use of GT funds and oversight of the programs by the ADE Office of Gifted and Talented. (These programs became a model and brought national awareness to Arkansas and Arkansas’ Gifted and Talented Programs.)	AEGIS grants provided for 2 - 3 week day and residential programs at sites around the state in content areas of Arts and Music, Science, Mathematics, Computer Sciences, Social Studies, Literature and Communications, and World Languages.
1983 – Act 34 – Required initial funding and formula for designating a specific portion of minimum foundation school funding for the specific purpose of providing programs for gifted and talented students. Required districts to match with 10% local funds. This was historically significant since it removed the legislation from the “unfunded mandate” context.	State education funding now included a requirement to use that allocation to support GT programs and took some of the <i>financial</i> responsibility off of individual districts to fund quality programs.
1983 – Act 56 – Further defined the duties of the Governor’s Advisory Council for the Education of Gifted and Talented Children, expanding their responsibilities with regard to site and staff selection for Governor’s School and established the Outstanding GT Programs awards to be awarded by the Governor’s Advisory Council.	This legislation provided for recognition of outstanding programs in Gifted Education in three categories based on district size with grant awards not to exceed \$3000.
1985 – Act 349 – Established 15 regional Education Service Cooperatives and included programs for gifted and talented students as one of the services offered by the Cooperatives.	This act allowed for the establishment of Co-op GT Specialists to assist districts in the maintenance and growth of GT Programs in the Co-op service area.
1989 – Act 693 - Extended the opportunity to junior high school gifted and talented students to participate in summer AEGIS Programs and expanded participation to 7 th and 8 th grade gifted and talented students.	GT students in grades 7-8 could participate in AEGIS programs, providing summer opportunities.
1993 – Act 294 – Specified the formula for calculating the amount of funding to be provided for the operation of a district’s program for gifted and talented students. The law stated funds would be based on “an add-on weight of twenty-five hundredths (.25) for each of its students identified as being gifted and talented under guidelines and criteria approved by the State Board of Education, up to a number equal to five percent (5%) of its ADM (Average Daily Membership) for the previous year.”	This bill secured state money for specific use for gifted and talented programs and ensured that GT would continue as a “funded mandate” with more financial security for programs for gifted and talented students.
1999 – Act 905 – Required “state supported colleges and universities to report to the ADE each semester the name, address, and major of each minority student completing college or university requirements for recommendation for licensure as a public school teacher in this state.” Gifted and Talented was included as an endorsement area. The intention of the law was to provide ADE data on the number of minority graduates from education degrees each semester.	The inclusion of gifted and talented as one of the endorsement areas provided continued legitimacy for the certification of GT teachers . The law provided a degree of monitoring of the number of minority students graduating with education degrees.
2003 – Act 61 – Required districts to report expenditures by categories and changed the multiplier established in Act 294 for calculating funds for GT Programs from .25 to .15 “of the foundation funding amount multiplied times five percent (5%) of the school district’s average daily membership from the previous year. The act also explicitly stated that funds could be spent “only upon gifted and talented programs in accordance with rules promulgated by the State Board of Education.”	The bill made two changes to the funding formula. The multiplier was decreased by .10 and the 5% of the total ADM (instead of “up to 5%”) established the number of students to be served with funding for each district.