

Cory Jennerjohn: Hello and welcome to another edition of Wisconsin Association for Gifted and Talented Podcast. I'm your host Cory Jennerjohn and today I have a very special guest. It is none other than Dr. Pam Clinkenbeard. She is a Board Member for WATG and I'm very happy that she is joining us because she has a whole wealth of information that we are going to be talking about today. But first I just want to bring her on and introduce herself, so Pam, take it away. Tell us a little bit about yourself.

Dr. Pam Clinkenbeard: Okay, thanks, Cory. I'm happy to be here today. I recently retired from the University of Wisconsin Whitewater where I was an education professor for almost 25 years. I focused on gifted and talented but also taught education psychology courses. I've been active in the National Association for Gifted Children for more decades than I care to reveal. And, what else, oh, I'm doing some international stuff now. Like I'm the liaison to the European Council for High Ability and there's also a World Council for Gifted and Talented Children. And I like to travel when travel is possible these days to some of those conferences and connect with other countries. It's kind of remarkable, really, the issues are often the same from country to country despite the differences in politics. I grew up in Indiana. I didn't have an advocacy background or formal training of any kind but I can talk a little more about that if you want to get into deep history. Otherwise, we can stick with current advocacy issues.

Cory: Yeah, we can hit on that in a second. But first of all, the big news surrounding WATG, Wisconsin, and education, is the legislation activity. More specifically the gifted education accountability bill. First of all, explain a little bit more what that is and why is that coming about right now.

Pam: Okay. So for reference, the current bill on the Assembly side is AB903 so you can actually look it up. The same bill with the same wording on the Senate side is SB860. So those are the numbers they are under right now. So the accountability bill came about because a number of us, we have, WATG has what we call the Government Action Committee, formally known as the Advocacy Committee. We were just sort of frustrated and hearing a lot of stories from people in districts where gifted education was just not happening. Kids are not being appropriately challenged. We had someone who testified in writing for the Assembly Committee on Education who said that her daughter was basically being used in the classroom as a teacher's aide. She finished her work quickly and early so the teacher would ask her to help the other kids. Now I think that's fine some of the time if the student wants to do that and if the student is more or less talented at doing it. But that should not be a replacement for appropriately challenging education. So we moved forward and contacted a couple of legislators whom we knew were interested in gifted education and one of them agreed to work with us to develop a bill and submit it. That would be Representative Petryk on the Assembly side and Senator Bernier on the Senate side.

Cory: So when you talk about the AB903 bill and how it's just about accountability and just making everybody aware. What does that mean for the average school district or the average student in Wisconsin?

Pam: Right, well mostly what it is, would be...A long time ago, districts were required to report on what they did for gifted education. This was even before I came to Wisconsin. It's been mandated that we have gifted education, identification and programming since the mid-'80s but there was a reporting document that was cut out as part of a paperwork reduction act many years ago. So districts that happened to be very interested in appropriate challenge for advanced learners go ahead and do it and a lot of the districts that are overwhelmed or underfunded or, that's just not one of their priorities. It just doesn't happen because there's no reporting requirement. So this particular bill increases the reporting that districts must do and it increases the reporting that DPI must do. So if it passes the main effect of it would be to report more clearly on things that are already mandated.

Cory: Okay, so basically more or less, kind of keeping better tabs on everybody surrounding gifted and talented education. Is that fair?

Pam: Uh, yeah, I think so. Of course, we'd love it if there were funding attached to it but in the current political climate, that's just not going to happen at least in this legislative session.

Cory: Why do you think, why do you think Pam, why do you think in the past there was such a problem with reporting accelerated education? Why do you think that was such an issue way back in the past?

Pam: I don't think it was actually a problem, I think it just got caught up. There was reporting, there was an old form, I still have copies of it called the PI9300, that was a reporting form that districts would fill out annually and send it to DPI. And I think that just fell by the wayside as this general paperwork reduction act.

Cory: Okay. Alright. So, what does this mean going forward for the gifted and talented kids? What should they expect from this would you say in the next 5, 10, 15 years do you think?

Pam: Well, right now we're focused so much on the short term, so just yesterday this bill passed the Assembly Committee on Education. So we expect that it will go to the full assembly for a vote. At which time we'd be asking people to write their state representative asking that person to support it. Down the road, if it passes and if it goes through, and if it's signed by the Governor, I think it will result in more consistent practices where people understand that they really need to challenge kids at an appropriate level. Another component of the bill that I think is really important is it requires reporting of student demographics. So, one of the issues we've seen is that some districts are decreasing or diminishing their advanced programming because they see it as an equity issue and we think that's a mistake and this bill would be helpful in that districts would have to say "who's getting advanced programming?", "what are their demographic characteristics?" and "how can we all look forward to a more inclusive vision of gifted education?"

Cory: Okay, I really like that, especially talking to Lalitha and some other Board Members. There's definitely an inclusion aspect of gifted and talented education that needs to be spotlighted and I think is really important and probably well overdue.

Pam: Yeah, and it's a big part of the national conversation in gifted education so equity and the gifted is really a serious and major topic. There've been whole conferences on it over the past few years.

Cory: So how does this, how does this compare and contrast with, say what the New York City's decision to end gifted and talented education? So if there's, to play devil's advocate, if there's a person that says why should Wisconsin do something like this when New York City decided to end their gifted and talented education? What would be the argument there?

Pam: That's an interesting case. New York City gets a lot of press. What they actually ended was the special schools, the special gifted schools, which are remarkable places. A lot of the entrance, admissions requirements for some of those advanced learning opportunities in New York depended on a single test score for pre-kindergarten students or very young students. Which is just crazy, basically. No one in the field would say that's good practice, that you should determine someone's schooling for the rest of their school career by a single test that they take when they're 4 or 5. So that, I think, has come under quite reasonable criticism. That particular case doesn't really translate to Wisconsin very much. In Wisconsin, we've had the services mandated but because of local control, a great deal of this is very much up to individual districts as to how they implement, giving appropriate challenge to advanced learners. And we have a few individual gifted schools in the state, some private and 1 or 2 public but by and large it's a school district decision.

Cory: Okay. So even if, hypo-, even if this does go through, and, and even if AB903 does go through, it's still is ultimately going to come down to each individual school district throughout the state and there's a good chance that school districts, wherever they may be, whether they be, urban, rural, they could just say sorry we're not going to put funding in, into gifted and talented education. I think that's kind of, I think that's kind of frustrating.

Pam: That is a risk but the bill also contains audit provisions such that if it passes DPI would need to randomly audit 10% of school districts, I believe we said every year in that bill, I believe that's what it says. So the danger is if you are not doing what is legally mandated for the district to do, the audit would turn that up.

Cory: Okay, alright, well that would be a good thing. Another thing, the WASB resolution, Wisconsin Association of School Boards, they passed the advanced learning resolution at its January conference. How impactful and how important was that resolution for the state of Wisconsin in terms of education?

Pam: I think it's really good that they did that and they, the process in a nutshell is that a single school board can propose a resolution that they would like the WASB delegate assembly to vote

on in January. And that's what happened here. The WASB Policy Committee looks at the proposed resolutions, re-words them a bit, moves forward the ones they think should be voted on and the final version of the WASB resolution is really nice. It talks about, it's an amendment of what they did in 2019 that just said essentially, "We think there ought to be more funding for gifted education", which, of course, WATG agrees with. Three years later the new resolution says a bit more about how or what that might look like. So there's more language about meeting unmet needs of advanced learners and making sure that everyone has an opportunity to reach their full potential no matter what their background.

Cory: Okay.

Pam: So the implications for it or the impact of it, it's really a nice policy statement by WASB and gives some guidance to school, not school districts generally, but school boards specifically who might be interested in adopting or looking at their own district policies to see if they're in line with that or if they want to be in line with that.

Cory: Okay. So Pam, like when organizations, when advocacy organizations like us or any other education organization advocates for gifted education and talks about more funds to fund gifted and talented education and is met by a lot of roadblocks, what are the top things that people say when, when they say that we don't have money for gifted and talented education. I was just wondering what the reasons are for having no money.

Pam: The main reason I hear from districts who might say, well we can't really afford to devote any resources to this, is the situation in Wisconsin with special education funding. So I'm not an expert in school finance. I have tried to understand it, at least at an amateur level for a long time. So districts will say that we're spending so much of our local resources trying to make up that gap in special education funding, we really don't have anything to devote to gifted education. I understand but it is still mandated and if you believe that every child deserves to learn something new every day, then it's really an important part of every school district's mission. There are low-cost activities that can be implemented. Anything related to personalized learning, anything related to acceleration, those don't necessarily require lots of materials or extra personnel. So we are definitely looking at issues related to acceleration and we don't have a specific gifted education model in Wisconsin, like at the DPI level. But what we have is advanced learners are included in RTI systems. So whether a district calls it RTI or multi-level services of MLSS, MTSS, that type of model is supposed to include advanced learners as well as students that have learning challenges.

Cory: Okay. That's interesting. So what, so what does all this mean moving forward then, Pam? You mentioned we have our eye on the short term but what's next, legislation-wise, coming down the road?

Pam: We're considering an acceleration bill but right now we're really focused on whether this bill passes. If it does pass, I think we'll move forward with looking at, do we have enough acceleration policy in the state? And we hope to pursue better funding for gifted education in the

next funding cycle. It's going to be a big lift but obviously, we have a little over \$400,000 a year in Wisconsin compared to some of our neighboring states with multiple millions. So we're looking at improving the financial state of gifted education. There are things that can be done aside from that. So like what I said earlier, the low-cost alternatives. But we'll be partnering with other organizations to see what can be done to, to improve the comprehensiveness and the transparency of advanced learning for kids.

Cory: Okay. That just blows my mind. The first time I heard that \$400,000 figure like that and compared and contrasted with other states that surround us, Iowa's number is pretty large and there are some other states that are pretty large. It just blows my mind only because of the fact Wisconsin has such a strong tradition of education and you'd think they'd want to spend more resources, more money, and have a higher prioritization of gifted and talented but it's kinda surprising it's not like that. Do you feel the same way, Pam?

Pam: Well yeah, at one time Wisconsin was a national leader in gifted education. But this was a very long time ago. This was in the '70s. University of Wisconsin-Madison had several people who were nationally and internationally known in gifted education. Over the years, people retired and left, those positions were not replaced with people who specialize in that area. So that might be part of the reason. I should point out, of the states, only about half of the states fund gifted education at least as a separate item in their state budgets. We are at the bottom of the states that do actually fund. So we're somewhere right in the middle in terms of financial resources devoted to gifted education. We did get, the grant, these are for the DPI grants, the \$400+ thousand dollars, we were at \$237,000 in the previous cycle and Senator Bernier helped double that money so the small grants that come from DPI, that money has at least doubled. But that's all there is labeled as gifted education money in Wisconsin.

Cory: I wonder if there's ever going to be, you know especially when it comes to the local school district level, Pam, I wonder if, you know, school districts with gifted and talented programs are going to have to come up with, you know, funding of their own if they want to make sure that they have a viable gifted and talented program. I wonder if they're going to have to do some sort of funding, like, will we see, I don't know, hypothetically a fruit sale or a pizza sale to fund gifted and talented education. Is that out of the realm of possibility?

Pam: Well I hope we don't have to do that (laughing). It really should be a core component of a school district's mission and vision to challenge everyone, not just students who are having trouble but students who finish early or who are working several years ahead of their classroom peers. It, personalized education, would be ideal but in some cases, I think that does take additional resources. So, you know bake sales and fruit sales and things, I have nothing against them, but I don't think that should be the dominant way of funding challenging education.

Cory: No, I agree 100%. Well, Pam, I agree and I thank you for all the work that you've done on this. You and all of the members of the WATG Government Action Committee have done excellent work with, throughout this whole process and seeing it through. And like you said, there's still more work to do so I really appreciate you sitting down and chatting and kind of

giving us a quick overview lay of the land of where we are and where we could potentially be. But if I'm a gifted and talented kid in the state of Wisconsin, I have to feel, I have to feel somewhat happy, right, I mean there's definitely, you know there's definitely something to be happy about. I would say, right?

Pam: Yeah, even if this bill doesn't go through, it has definitely raised the visibility of gifted education in the state and in the state legislature. I, because I hate to give up the chance to plug this, I want to remind everyone to find out who their State Assemblyperson, their State Representative is and who their State Senator is. And we have a lot of resources on the WATG site. You can go to the state legislature homepage and just enter your home address and see who your particular representatives are. The reason to do that is, it's not so much that we need to reach every single legislator, we need to have personal relationships with some legislators who are most focused on moving education forward in the state. And it's amazing how, how few contacts can actually make a difference. Some of the legislator's staffers we've been working with will say, "You know if we get three calls on something, the Representative will pay greater attention." Because not that many people contact their legislators. It's not that hard.

Cory: That's a really great point. And the website there that Pam was mentioning is [www.watg.org](http://www.watg.org) Just go there, there's a wealth of information with legislators and contact information, you can go there, pick up the phone, you can send an email. There's a lot of different ways that you can communicate with legislators. I agree 100% with what Pam was saying. They do want to be contacted, they do want, they want, they want to know what everyone is thinking, what everybody wants. Remember they are your legislator. So the best way to do that is by contacting them and letting them know. So I think that's great advice. Okay, for a Dr. Pam Clinkenbeard, I am Cory Jennerjohn, thanks again for listening to the WATG Podcast. Pam, once again, thanks a lot for, for having on and giving all your information. Thanks a lot for all of your hard work through this entire process as we continue to watch and see it through. Really really much appreciated.

Pam: Well, thank you Cory, and thank you for doing these podcasts for WATG. It's really a nice feature of the organization.

Cory: Well you're very welcome.