

Serving All Gifted Students in Lean Financial Times

By Dina Brulles, Ph.D.

Around the country and in Arizona, schools are seeking cost-effective ways to strengthen services for gifted students. Ensuring that *all* gifted students receive services including those from historically under-represented populations—has also emerged as a priority. Many are now turning to the Schoolwide Cluster Grouping Model (SCGM), an inclusive model that serves and enfranchises all gifted students. The SCGM can provide full-time services and facilitate improved achievement for all, yet requires minimal funding for the school district.

In the SCGM, students are grouped into classrooms based on their abilities and potential. Classrooms are carefully structured with two main goals: to ensure a balance of ability and achievement throughout the grade level, and to reduce the learning range found in any given classroom. The system provides opportunities for teachers to more readily respond to the needs of all their students due to the slightly narrowed range of ability. Teachers can then better challenge their gifted students while engaging in practices that lead to improved academic achievement for all students.

Purposefully clustering gifted students into otherwise heterogeneous classes makes it more likely for students' learning needs to be identified by the teacher. Educational research suggests that teachers use similar instructional strategies with all students who would benefit from differentiated instruction. These methods support student enrichment and higher levels of achievement for all students. Incorporating cluster grouping models demonstrates a school's commitment to educating all students, including the gifted learner.

On January 6, 42 Pinal County educators attended an informative Cluster Grouping presentation by Dr. Brulles, hosted by the Pinal County Gifted Consortium at the Pinal Co