

Creating an Infrastructure for Advocacy

NAGC understands the power of federal, state, and local policy to create environments that either support or hinder the learning, growth, and development of gifted and talented children. As a result, the NAGC Board of Directors charged the office to create a strategy to “advocate for the adoption of policies that promote programs and services in which gifted and talented children will thrive” through the strategic framework adopted in September, 2016.

The nature of American education is one of decentralization. Education is primarily a local and state activity with a loose framework of direction, support, and guidance from federal law and policy. To increase continuity and equity for gifted children across our nation’s education system, it is imperative that NAGC develop and publicly articulate a national (federal, state, local) policy and advocacy agenda. The agenda should call for specific policies and programs that support all gifted and talented students regardless of their background. Due to the decentralized education system in the United States, NAGC must engage in a multi-pronged strategy to influence policy at both the federal and state levels.

The most recent reauthorization of the Federal *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (ESEA) has several important provisions to support gifted and talented students. This version of federal law, for the first time, specifically references the learning needs of gifted and talented students.

For example:

Title I now enumerates that -

- Funds may be used to identify and serve gifted and talented students;
- Disaggregation of student achievement data at each achievement level on state and local report cards must be included; and
- States may develop computer adaptive assessments used for accountability purposes.

Title II: Professional Development -

- State plans must address gifted students;
- Districts receiving Title II funds must provide training to address the learning of gifted and talented students; and
- Districts may provide training to support the identification of gifted and talented students, including high-ability students who have not been formally identified as gifted and talented.

The new federal law creates opportunities for state and local leaders to support gifted students, but offers no promises

for quality services. To leverage the opportunity for positive change, NAGC will organize members to highlight exemplar policies and practices to increase their chance of eventually being incorporated into federal policies and programs.

To build on the advances made in federal policy, NAGC will continue and strengthen its focus on the following federal advocacy objectives:

- Maintaining and growing investments in the Jacob Javits Gifted and Talented Education Program;
- Ensuring that Title I and II guidance addresses the education of gifted and talented students; and
- Advocating for regulatory changes to support gifted and talented students (if applicable).

Additionally, NAGC will work with leaders and members to articulate policy objectives for adoption and implementation at the state and local levels. After receiving informal feedback from several NAGC constituencies, reviewing NAGC whitepapers, and NAGC supported research, there appears to be general consensus that our organization’s policy agenda focus on five areas (in no specific order of importance):

- Identification;
- Acceleration;
- Professional development;
- Including gifted students in the accountability system; and
- Comprehensive state support for gifted and talented students.

These five areas are meant to provide focus and foster an evolving dialog as we build out a more detailed national policy framework to facilitate a more supportive policy environment to fulfill the strategic goal set by our Board. The first four focus areas drill down on a specific policy objective and the fifth is purposely more comprehensive and aspirational in nature. These areas of focus reflect an attempt at a bipartisan legislative baseline as we advocate for national policies to support gifted and talented students. They also keep in mind that some legislators prefer to highlight a specific issue (e.g. supporting teachers) and others prefer a more comprehensive approach.

To advance these policies, NAGC must build an infrastructure for advocacy. This requires strengthening our organization’s capacity to reach every Congressional district and to maintain contact throughout the year. Ideally, NAGC will build groups of at least two advocates in each Congressional district with the interest, knowledge, and skills to effectively engage in advocacy with their respective members of the U.S. Congress.

This is an ambitious task, but we can focus our early efforts

to build our capacity to influence key leaders in the House and Senate:

- Chairs and Ranking Members of Education Authorizing Committees in the House and Senate;
- Chairs and Ranking Members of the Education Appropriations Sub-committees in the House and Senate; and
- Members of the Committees that write the law and allocate the money and are not the Chair/Ranking Member.

We are working to organize leaders like you in teams made up of professionals in the field of education, parents, and business professionals who will serve as third party validators. NAGC will support these teams to advocate for the gifted in Congressional districts across the United States. We are in the process of recruiting leaders with interest in advocacy and will provide support during the March Leadership & Advocacy meeting in Washington, DC. Also, to the extent practicable, NAGC needs to highlight that it's extremely important that the individuals selected are representative of the diversity of their communities.

The work of organizing as advocates and affecting policy change is challenging and ambitious, but attainable. The work has already begun by advocates and the national office in the state of Washington. Take a look at our recent collaboration at www.nagc.org/blog/creating-change-through-collaboration-and-advocacy and consider ways that we can

replicate this advocacy effort in your region so that children get the support they need as they reach for their personal best. **THP**

Write for THP

Do you have practical classroom applications of current research, theory, and best practices in the field of gifted education? Are you proud of the innovative way you address the needs of gifted students in your school or classroom? Have you created a successful lesson or unit plan that aligns with the revised NAGC Pre-K-Grade 12 Gifted Programming Standards? If so, we want to hear from you! Send manuscripts to: Jeff S. Danielian, Editor, THP at jdanielian@nagc.org.



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