

## Administrator Quick Guide to Gifted Education

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## Definition and Rationale for Gifted Education

**What is "gifted"?** The term is specifically defined in some state codes, but may be called "high ability," "talented," or other designation. The field of study devoted to understanding these children and how to provide for their development is called "gifted education."

NAGC definition: "Gifted individuals are those who demonstrate outstanding levels of aptitude (defined as exceptional ability to reason and learn) or competence (documented performance or achievement in top 10% or rarer) in one or more domains." (<http://www.nagc.org/WhatisGiftedness.aspx>)

NOTE: In schools, the term gifted recognizes exceptionalism in aptitude or achievement that requires appropriately differentiated services in order for the student(s) to develop to their potential.

### Rationale: Regardless of the state and the varying code and rule requirements

- Developing and nurturing high performance supports the future prosperity of our nation, state, community, and of individuals.
- Most gifted students are not developing to the level their potential would indicate is possible. ([http://edexcellencemedia.net/publications/2011/20110920\\_HighFlyers/Do\\_High\\_Flyers\\_Maintain\\_Their\\_Altitude\\_FINAL.pdf](http://edexcellencemedia.net/publications/2011/20110920_HighFlyers/Do_High_Flyers_Maintain_Their_Altitude_FINAL.pdf))
- In the normal distribution of ability and/or of achievement, 68% score near the mean; students far from the mean require different educational experiences to develop optimally or at all.
- All children deserve the opportunity to learn something new each day.
- Schools have a responsibility to meet the learning needs of all students. Gifted children are found in all income, cultural, and racial groups; gifted children may also have one or more disabilities.
- Most teachers say their brightest students are bored and under challenged. (<http://www.edexcellence.net/publications/high-achieving-students-in.html>)
- Most teachers have no training in working with gifted learners. ([http://www.edexcellencemedia.net/publications/2008/200806\\_highachievingstudentsintheeraofnochildleftbehind/20080625-farkas-pp.pdf](http://www.edexcellencemedia.net/publications/2008/200806_highachievingstudentsintheeraofnochildleftbehind/20080625-farkas-pp.pdf))
- In classroom observations, most learning activities are not differentiated for gifted learners.

### Considerations

- Multifaceted systems are necessary for identification to find *all* students with advanced potential from *all* income, racial, and cultural groups to be certain we are accountable to developing their potential.
- It is unrealistic to expect high school students with advanced potential to perform at high levels if they have not had previous and continuous opportunity to work at an advanced level. (<http://www.act.org/content/dam/act/unsecured/documents/ForgottenMiddle-ResearchStudy2014.pdf>)
- Identifying students with advanced potential and providing services beginning in Kindergarten is needed or high performance from many is lost. ([http://www.jkcf.org/assets/1/7/Achievement\\_Trap.pdf](http://www.jkcf.org/assets/1/7/Achievement_Trap.pdf))

- Curriculum, instruction, and assessment must be modified to meet the needs of gifted learners.
- Assessment systems need to be designed to measure growth for all students, including those capable of above-grade level achievement.
- The performance of advanced students needs to be monitored to ensure continued learning gains.

### **Implications: The responsibility is shared**

- States: expect and monitor annual growth of all student groups, including the gifted, and report that growth by the disaggregated group.
- Districts: design appropriate policies, services, and professional development for teachers of the gifted.
- Buildings: implement services and assess teacher effectiveness in developing potential of gifted students.
- Teachers: provide appropriately differentiated learning experiences for gifted students.
- Parents: become educated about how to develop talents and good work habits in gifted children.

## **Accountability, Assessment, and Learning Growth for Gifted Students**

### **Accountability Depends on Appropriate Measurement**

- States, districts, buildings, and classrooms are accountable for the learning growth for *all* students.
- The most meaningful measure is *not* the percentage of students demonstrating a minimal level of proficiency, but rather the number of students who demonstrate an agreed upon amount of growth, over a specified period of time, as a result of their educational placement.

### **Gifted Student Growth Cannot Be Measured on Many Assessments**

- Current measures are commonly criterion referenced to grade-level standards, resulting in an inability for gifted learners to demonstrate knowledge above grade level for the baseline or later measurements. Measures constructed using a vertical scale of continuous progress over multiple grade levels are needed to assess growth for individual students.
- Elementary gifted students were shown to know 40-50% of the grade-level curriculum on the first day of school. (<http://www.gifted.uconn.edu/nrcgt/reports/rm93106/rm93106.pdf>)
- Computer adaptive accountability systems may be able to address a greater range of student performance. Above grade or off-level testing can be effective in demonstrating higher level performance or the appropriateness of above-grade placement for instruction.
- Achievement assessments that are standardized, norm referenced, and have high enough ceilings can give good information about what gifted students already know and have learned since previous testing. These are useful for instructional planning as well as accountability.
- Items that assess critical thinking and not just knowledge and comprehension are needed.
- An NAGC position paper on accountability may be helpful. (<http://www.nagc.org/sites/default/files/Position%20Statement/Accountability%20for%20Gifted%20and%20Talented%20Student%20Learning.pdf>)

**Teacher Accountability:** Professional evaluations call for objective measures related to student growth as well as additional evidence of effective teaching and professional practice.

- Pre-tests for specific goals, for units, or for a year provide an accurate measure of a student's knowledge of upcoming content and skills. These pretests establish the baseline for growth and the instructional level needed. They are locally developed if state accountability measures do not contain adequate ceilings.
- Post-tests aligned with the pre-tests provide evidence that the change in student performance can be attributed to instruction.
- Professional practice includes the use of student data to plan instruction. Data provide evidence of the need for and planning of differentiation.
- Professional practice includes participation in professional development for meeting the needs of students with high abilities.
- Classroom observation of gifted student instruction includes assessment of specific elements of instruction that are effective for these learners. *Assessing Classroom Differentiation* is an observation tool that can be found at <http://www.nagc.org/administratortoolbox.aspx>.

- Personnel knowledgeable about gifted learners are included at all levels of curriculum, instruction, and assessment decision-making.

## Critical Content of Gifted Education for K-12 Schools

**Potential and Performance:** Opportunity, motivation, and task commitment can assist in developing advanced potential into outstanding performance. Schools can find those learners with advanced potential and design appropriately differentiated experiences that provide opportunity and challenge to develop a particular talent into outstanding performance. Curriculum and experiences designed for typical learners are not sufficiently complex to develop advanced potential.

### Identify Students Who Need Gifted Services

- It is a state and local responsibility to identify and serve gifted students; there is no federal law.
- Check state code and rules to find domains of giftedness required to be identified and served (e.g., general intellectual, specific academic, visual and performing arts, creativity).
- District-level identification ensures consistent, fair practices and implementation.
- The purpose of identifying gifted children is to provide them with specific services in order to develop their advanced potential in a particular domain, not to identify them for the sake of a label.
- Identification measures are matched to the services provided (e.g., for services in language arts, use a measure of verbal reasoning and a measure of verbal achievement; a student could be identified through either pathway).
- A multifaceted identification system includes measures of performance (achievement), measures of potential (ability/aptitude), and qualitative data (descriptive data specific to the domain being served).
- Effective performance measures in academic content areas are valid, reliable, and include norm-referenced achievement tests with high ceilings. Criterion-referenced measures frequently have grade-level ceilings.
- With fair and defensible identification systems, the group of students identified for gifted services will reflect the cultural, linguistic, and economic diversity of the district as a whole.
- Unless the state requires otherwise, students can qualify if they score at an outstanding level on *either* the achievement *or* the ability measure. Not all students have had equal opportunity to develop.
- Unless the state requires otherwise, different norms (local and subgroup), rather than different measures, will help find students from traditionally underrepresented populations.
- Screening procedures are designed to include all students at targeted points in the school sequence.
- Establish and equitable appeals and exit procedures are best practice.

### Provide Appropriately Differentiated Learning Experiences

- Gifted students show greater achievement gains when they have opportunities to learn together. Ability grouping for the gifted is an evidence-based practice.
- Grouping must be accompanied by more in-depth curriculum and more rigorous instructional methods for gains to occur.
- Greater learning gains occur when challenge is provided daily in the talent area.
- Gifted students benefit from opportunities to pursue individual interests in depth.
- Acceleration combined with enrichment (tied to content) is needed for optimal growth.
- Gifted learners respond well to a faster pace of instruction with more complex and in-depth content.
- An acceleration policy establishes procedures for learners capable of more rapid progression.
- Quality instruction develops critical and creative thinking.
- Further differentiation of gifted services, curriculum, pacing, and instruction is necessary to meet individual needs. This is true even within programs such as Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate.
- Some gifted students will need additional and ongoing supports in order to be successful.
- Teachers of gifted students need ongoing specialized professional development led by qualified individuals with deep content knowledge and experience in gifted education.
- Learning experiences should be developed and articulated across K-12 for systematic talent development.

- Gifted students benefit from differentiated guidance and counseling services and deliberate cultivation of intrapersonal skills that support a commitment to high achievement.

### Advanced Performance and Program Effectiveness

- Statewide and district assessments allow for above-grade achievement and individual growth.
- Some gifted students need additional opportunities for above-level work, such as taking high school courses in middle school; college level work while in high school.
- Evidence of advanced performance is collected and used for decision making across each domain included in a talent development framework.
- Evaluating program effectiveness analyzes outcomes, solicits feedback, looks for program coherence, and provides direction for future improvements based upon data.

## Gifted Education, Common Core Standards, and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills

### The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and Gifted Education

- The CCSS incorporate more rigorous content and the development of higher level thinking than was consistently present in many individual states' standards. They include evidence-based practices and content specifically designed to increase student success beyond K-12, in the workplace, and in the global community.
- The CCSS are *not*, however, sufficient on their own for gifted learners, and if adhered to without differentiation, may limit learning of gifted students. Specifically, the following statements come directly from the CCSS developers: (<http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/introduction/key-design-consideration>)
  - "While the Standards focus on what is most essential, they do not describe all that can or should be taught."
  - "The Standards do not define the nature of advanced work for students who meet the Standards prior to the end of high school."
  - "The Standards set grade-specific standards but do not define the intervention methods or materials necessary to support students who are well below or well above grade-level expectations."
- Curriculum for gifted students should align to the CCSS, but not be limited to the CCSS. Gifted curriculum should also include advanced content, acceleration in depth and pace, complexity, enrichment, and differentiated instruction and assessment. (<http://www.nagc.org/CommonCoreStateStandards.aspx>)

### 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills and Gifted Education

- The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills is a framework that is designed to articulate the knowledge, skills, and understandings beyond content that all students must possess for success in the global community.
  - Students are encouraged to learn and apply the innovation skills of higher-order thinking, critical reasoning, creative production, problem finding and solving, and decision making.
  - Students learn effective practices in communication and collaboration.
  - Students develop life, career, and self-regulation skills.
  - Students develop effective information, media, and technology strategies.
- The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills include elements that have been a part of gifted education since its inception. Gifted education professionals can provide leadership for their colleagues in project-based learning, using technology, collaboration, and effective communication.

**Summary:** The Common Core State Standards and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills movements recognize that American schools need more rigorous expectations for student performance and that students need to gain more than content to be successful in the global economy. This is welcome reform for the general educational system. Gifted learners still differ from more typical learners in significant ways and the development of their talent requires further differentiation in services, curriculum, and instruction. For students this means work at a different level rather than more of the same work.

## Gifted Students, Gifted Services, and Response to Intervention (RtI)

What is RtI?	How Can RtI Include Gifted Students?
Response to Intervention (or Instruction) is usually a school-wide model	By holding the model accountable for the full range of students, the model includes appropriate educational experiences for gifted learners as well as for those students who may struggle in some way. Use a talent development vs. a deficit approach.
Method for identifying and serving students with additional academic and social-emotional needs	RtI can be a method for early recognition of strengths and needs. "Additional academic and social-emotional needs" includes both interventions and alternate experiences, extensions, or acceleration. This includes meeting the needs of students who are gifted and those who are twice exceptional (e.g., are both gifted and have a disability such as SLD, ASD, ADHD).
Based on the premise that all students have access to a high quality core of instruction	High quality, grade-level core curriculum is inadequate for gifted learners. However, it is possible to supplement or replace the core with suitable acceleration, depth, and complexity in Tiers I, II, and III.
Includes universal screening and assessments	Assessments include those for achievement and ability. Assessments have adequate ceilings for the gifted and allow for demonstration of above-grade level performance.
Requires some students to have additional time and attention	Gifted students can have additional time with teachers with expertise in differentiation for gifted learners.
Includes progress monitoring and standard protocols for students who need additional supports and/or services	Progress monitoring is used to document mastery and need for compacted or replacement curriculum. Progress monitoring and interventions are used as a part of a decision making process for further services and for documenting student growth and performance.
Includes a team approach to problem solving that involves parents	A team approach is helpful for gifted students with diverse needs including underachievers with advanced potential, those who need additional acceleration or enrichment, or those needing counseling services.
Involves a tiered system of supports based on level of need	Gifted students differ in their strengths and in their need for intensity of services. Twice-exceptional students need services for both disability and high ability.

### The Possibilities

- **RtI can supplement but not replace a systematic program of services for students with high abilities.**
- When all students are assessed, include provisions for assessing strengths as well as deficits.
- An RtI structure permits flexibility between tiers of supports so that individual needs for additional challenge may be addressed.
- In teacher training for RtI, characteristics of all learners, including those who are gifted, can be incorporated.
- Through RtI, teachers address the needs of gifted students including those who also have learning disabilities.

### CAUTION: RtI Systems are Rarely Implemented Effectively for Gifted Learners

- When any system is said to include identification and services for *all* children, some interpret that to mean that training, identification, and services specific to the needs of gifted students are no longer needed. This is not true. Teachers who have gifted students in their classrooms need professional development in gifted education.
- Schoolwide frameworks incorporating differentiation and enrichment work best when they are supplemented with acceleration, planned articulation, affective supports, and expanded learning opportunities based on students' strengths.
- National research has shown 84% of classroom activities are *not* differentiated for gifted students in heterogeneous classrooms (<http://www.gifted.uconn.edu/nrcgt/westarc1.html>).