

**Growth in Achievement of Advanced Students
Council of Exceptional Children-The Association for the Gifted (CEC-TAG)**

CEC-TAG urges Congress to hold schools accountable for growth of individual students who perform at the advanced, beyond "proficient" levels, when designing growth model accountability systems in the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 as reauthorized by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.

Background

The reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, No Child Left Behind (NCLB) mandates that states establish accountability plans. In meeting NCLB requirements, these plans have used a status model, which relies on a single year's assessment as an indicator of how many students are achieving proficiency on academic content standards. Status models tend to focus a school's attention and resources on those students who are *not* achieving proficiency rather than those who are *above* proficiency. In 2005, the U.S. Secretary of Education announced the federal growth model pilot program as an alternative method that states could use for purposes of meeting adequate yearly progress (AYP). In contrast to status models, growth models are developed to track individual student performance over time. The development of the growth model pilot program was heralded by educators and policymakers as a means by which the academic achievement growth of students at both ends of the achievement spectrum could be measured. These pilot programs have not lived up to this promise. The current structure of the growth model pilot programs expands the ability of a state to count students as proficient in determining AYP if they are *on target* toward proficiency but does not address those students who are above the target. This focus has left advanced students in general education classrooms unchallenged, which has often resulted in underachievement and even dropping out of school, particularly for those students from lower income backgrounds.

Position Statement

The Association for the Gifted (TAG) believes that growth models should replace status models so that all students' progress can be measured over time. Further, CEC-TAG believes that on-going assessment is necessary in planning instruction for individual students. While schools should examine a wide range of group differences to determine if students are receiving opportunities to learn such as socioeconomic status, gender, race or ethnicity, disability, or English language status, this position paper pertains to students who perform at the advanced level and the necessity for growth models that take their educational needs into account.

Issues

Several issues with growth models have been identified by the Council for Exceptional Children-The Association for the Gifted as affecting advanced students. These include:

1. States are under pressure to be sure that students meet minimal standards of proficiency and show adequate yearly progress. Given this pressure, schools are more likely to attend to those students just below proficient and to ignore students above proficient.
2. Current state achievement tests do not have enough difficult items to adequately measure advanced students' growth. Growth models will not be effective for advanced students if existing measures are used.
3. Current growth models compare students' prior achievement to a minimum standard. This leads to teaching to the test with a focus on students below the proficient level. In addition, with the current emphasis on reading and mathematics, other subject areas do not receive the instructional emphasis that they should.
4. Advanced children from lower income backgrounds who are in the top academic quartiles are particularly vulnerable to assessments that measure only minimum levels of proficiency: only 56% maintain their status as high achievers in reading by fifth grade; 25% fall out of the top academic quartile in math in high school; and 8% drop out of high school.

Recommendations

Therefore, CEC-TAG recommends that growth model systems consider advanced students by including these characteristics:

- Growth models need to reflect growth beyond proficiency. Defining growth as beyond "proficiency" takes into account students who score higher than a minimal level of proficient and focus the school's attention on all students. In this way, advanced students are challenged and less likely to underachieve, particularly those from lower income background who tend to lose ground during their K-12 years when compared to other advanced students. For example, states might consider tracking students who are scoring higher than proficient in one year to determine if this level is being attained from one year to the next.
- State assessments should be able to measure beyond minimum skills. Schools need to measure above grade-level achievement in order to document advanced student growth. Since advanced students get all or nearly all of the items correct, more difficult, above grade-level items need to be included in state assessments.
- Models need to expand their focus to take into consideration teacher and program effects on *all* students' performance and determine how best to instruct students who are advanced in a variety of domains (i.e. the arts, sciences, etc.). Collaborations between universities and school systems might

examine effective evidence-based practices that could be nationally disseminated.

- The term growth model should be clearly defined as measurement of academic success on the basis of how much student achievement improves and should be based on individual student gains. Growth models always need to be designed in a way that encourages mastery of grade-level content and fosters growth above grade-level. In its simplest form a student's previous scores are used to create predicted scores for a given year. The difference between the actual score and predicted score is their growth score.

Summary

CEC-TAG is committed to an assessment system that measures individual growth beyond proficiency levels. This growth model system would not only enhance the opportunities for more students to learn beyond minimum levels but also focus needed resources in the design of assessments that show above-level performance.

References

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The National Association for Gifted Children and its Board of Directors has reviewed this position and express general support for its views and concepts. November, 2009

About NAGC

The National Association for Gifted Children is an organization of parents, educators, other professionals, and community leaders who unite to address the unique needs of all children and youth with demonstrated gifts and talents as well as those who may be able to develop their talent potential with appropriate educational experiences. We support and develop policies and practices that encourage and respond to the diverse expressions of gifts and talents in children and youth from all cultures, racial and ethnic backgrounds, and socioeconomic groups. To this end, NAGC supports and engages in research and development, staff development, advocacy, communication, and collaboration with other organizations and agencies that strive to improve the quality of education for all students.