

A Definition of Giftedness that Guides Best Practice

NAGC believes it is essential to define giftedness in a way that both reflects best thinking in the field and moves beyond a focus on identification criteria to a deeper understanding of the complex nature of giftedness and the multi-faceted approach to services required to appropriately serve students with gifts and talents. NAGC supports the following definition, which includes five key elements educators in all settings must address to ensure equitable identification and comprehensive services.

NAGC's definition of giftedness

Students with gifts and talents perform - or have the capability to perform - at higher levels compared to others of the same age, experience, and environment in one or more domains. They require modification(s) to their educational experience(s) to learn and realize their potential. Student with gifts and talents:

- Come from all racial, ethnic, and cultural populations, as well as all economic strata.
- Require sufficient access to appropriate learning opportunities to realize their potential.
- Can have learning and processing disorders that require specialized intervention and accommodation.
- Need support and guidance to develop socially and emotionally as well as in their areas of talent.
- Require varied services based on their changing needs.

Gifted students come from all racial, ethnic, and cultural populations, as well as all economic strata

Although the percentage of students served in gifted education programs does not currently reflect the general student population, gifted and talented youth exist in all cultural and economic groups. One contributor to this underrepresentation has been an assumption that there are few students to identify in these groups, an assumption often fueled by a lack of awareness on the part of many educators and policymakers. Consequently, many school systems use identification methods that contribute to disproportionality when procedures, such as universal screening, have been found to increase the number of low-income and minority students identified as gifted by 180%. When appropriate identification protocols are employed along with programming models that cultivate potential, more students from historically underrepresented groups can be identified, resulting in a more equitable process and gifted enrollments more reflective of the national student population.

Gifted students require sufficient access to appropriate learning opportunities to realize their potential

Determining a student's potential requires consideration of the individual's contexts and previous opportunities to learn, not just the student's age or grade-level performance. Adverse developmental effects have been noted for gifted students who do not have opportunities for early education or to participate in challenging programs. This is particularly true for those from poverty who underperform when compared to their gifted peers from higher socioeconomic backgrounds and are at greater risk for dropping out of high-achieving groups during the elementary and secondary school years. Conversely, well-designed programs that challenge and support gifted students, including those from underserved populations, are associated with increased success.

Gifted students can have learning and processing disorders that require specialized intervention and accommodation

Some students who are gifted and talented may also have a disability or mental health diagnosis in one or more domains, e.g., Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, dyslexia, dysgraphia, or Autism Spectrum Disorder. Being twice-exceptional may negatively impact gifted education identification and opportunity to foster talents, as well as psychosocial functioning. Twice-exceptional students' area(s) of disability often impact performance on academic tests that is commensurate to their advanced abilities and potential. Accurate identification of both talent and disability domains is crucial to guide appropriate psychological and educational planning. Despite variability in recommended strategies for addressing specific domains of talent and/or disability, research supports the adoption of a strengths-based, talent-focused approach with twice-exceptional students both in and out of the classroom.

Gifted students need support and guidance to develop socially and emotionally as well as in their area of talent

Socio-emotional development may lag intellectual development. Thus, it is crucial that gifted education professionals and parents of students with gifts and talents promote well-rounded development and the pursuit of self-actualization. Further, qualities such as emotion regulation, social skills, willingness to take strategic risks, ability to cope with challenges and handle criticism, confidence, self-perceptions, and motivation should be developed, as they may differentiate those individuals who move to increasingly higher levels of talent development from those who do not. These qualities should be further differentiated based on the domain of talent and the stage of talent development.

Gifted students require varied services based on their changing needs

Students with gifts and talents have needs along a continuum as well as in a diverse range of domains, both cognitive and affective. Needs also differ among gifted students within domains based on their readiness for more advanced content. The services that students receive should reflect a match between both their current achievement levels or potential and instruction that addresses their immediate and future needs. The goal of services should be to alleviate a need that would otherwise go unmet. Because students' needs and educational environments change over time, gifted education services must change as well.

Summary

Ensuring equity and success in gifted education programs requires effort. Those efforts begin with embracing a definition of giftedness that clarifies not only our understanding of the construct, but also how schools and school systems respond to this definition. Specifically, NAGC recommends that schools, school systems, and other education providers:

- Employ appropriate identification protocols and programming models that cultivate potential in order to identify more gifted students from historically underrepresented groups.
- Provide access to challenging learning opportunities for all students, especially those who are more likely to be overlooked, so that emerging talents may be recognized and developed.
- Commit to accurate identification of both talent and disability domains for twice-exceptional students; adopt a strengths-based, talent-focused approach in and out of the classroom.
- Educate teachers and parents on strategies for supporting the socio-emotional development of gifted students.
- Develop a range of varied gifted education services to address the diverse and changing needs of students with gifts and talents.

Suggested Resources

Diverse Populations

- Card, D., & Giuliano, L. (2015). *Can universal screening increase the representation of low income and minority students in gifted education?* (No. 21519).
- Ford, D. (2013). *Recruiting and retaining culturally different students in gifted education*. Waco, TX: Prufrock Press.
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Adverse Developmental Effects

- Henfield, M. S., Woo, H., & Bang, N. M. (2017). Gifted ethnic minority students and academic achievement: A meta-analysis. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 61, 3-19.
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- Xiang, Y., Dahlin, M., Cronin, J., Theaker, R., & Durant, S. (2011). *Do high flyers maintain their altitude? Performance trends of top students*. Washington, DC: Fordham Institute.

Learning/Processing Disorders

- Baum, S. M., Schader, R. M., & Hébert, T. P. (2014). Through a different lens: Reflecting on a strengths-based, talent-focused approach for twice-exceptional learners. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 58, 311-327.
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Social/Emotional Development

- Dixson, D. D., Worrell, F. C., Olszewski-Kubilius, P., & Subotnik, R. F. (2016). Beyond perceived ability: The contribution of psychosocial factors to academic performance. *Annals of the New York Academy of Science*, 1377, 67-77.
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Varied Services

- Borland, J. (2005). Gifted education without gifted children: The case for no conception of giftedness. In R. J. Sternberg & J. E. Davidson (Eds.), *Conceptions of giftedness* (2nd ed., pp. 1-19). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
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NAGC is an organization of parents, teachers, educators, other professionals, and community leaders who unite to address the unique needs of children and youth with demonstrated gifts and talents as well as those children who may be able to develop their talent potential with appropriate educational experiences.

All position statements are approved by the NAGC Board of Directors and remain consistent with the organization's position that education in a democracy must respect the uniqueness of all individuals, the broad range of cultural diversity present in our society, and the similarities and differences in learning characteristics that can be found within any group of students. NAGC Position Statements can be found at www.nagc.org.