

SUPPORTING GIFTED STUDENTS WITH DIVERSE SEXUAL ORIENTATIONS AND GENDER IDENTITIES

In a world of ever-increasing gender equality in marriage, employment, and military service, of equitable treatment of and opportunities for gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, transgender, and questioning (GLBTQ) persons in these domains, and of understanding multicultural concerns in general, many educational groups are concerned about how best to address the particular needs of students with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities. NAGC, which has an organizational policy of non-discrimination, supports respectful and equitable treatment of GLBTQ gifted youth. NAGC recommends that educators demonstrate compassionate understanding of these students and support them in maximizing their potential. Similar to other gifted youth, students with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities may have strengths in one or more areas of giftedness (i.e., intellectual, creative, artistic, leadership, academic). They are present across, genders, cultural and ethnic groups, income levels, geographical locations, religions, and abilities/disabilities. However, unlike most other groups of gifted students, they may not only feel different from other youth because of giftedness, but also may feel isolated due to sexual identity and/or gender expression. Related concerns follow:

- Gifted youth with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities have unique needs related to both strengths and social challenges (Friedrichs, 2012; Peterson & Rischar, 2000; Whittenburg & Treat, 2008).
- Diverse sexual orientation and gender identity complexly affect the experience of social and emotional development (Peterson & Rischar, 2000).
- Verbal and physical harassment, violence, and bias can foster isolation and underachievement in gifted youth with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities (Friedrichs, 2012; Whittenburg & Treat, 2008).
- Fears of violence at school and of parental abandonment can also contribute to *extreme* achievement and involvement, depression and suicidal thoughts, and hiding distress from parents and teachers (Peterson & Rischar, 2000).
- GLBTQ youth may experience high rates of substance abuse, sexually-transmitted diseases, and differential access to school services, all of these potential by-products of social alienation (Cross, 2013; Treat, 2008, Whittenburg & Treat, 2008).
- Educational and other institutional barriers face educators, counselors, and researchers who wish to assist gifted youth with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities (Friedrichs, 2012; Whittenburg & Treat, 2008), yet courageous educators can help to create safe classrooms and schools (Peterson & Rischar, 2000).

It is critical to note that youth with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities may be known or not known as sexual minorities to educators. Therefore, NAGC recommends these actions by school administrators, teachers, and counselors:

- Ensure that curriculum, including curriculum for gifted youth, includes positive examples of individuals with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities.
- Ensure that career education avoids stereotypes and encourages GLBTQ students to consider careers that are appropriate for their talents and interests.
- Include positive role models in gifted education programming who have diverse sexual orientations and gender identities (e.g., guest speakers, mentors, job shadowing, internships with culturally-sensitive mentors).

- Work toward safe schools/safe zones to protect and nurture the unique sensitivities of GLBTQ gifted youth.
- Use inclusive language in school correspondence and documentation that respects diverse sexual orientations and gender identities of parents/guardians, educators, and students.
- Help families nurture GLBTQ students' special strengths, healthy social and emotional development, and self-advocacy skills for both in and out of school.
- Accommodate researchers with substantive and credible projects related to gifted youth with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities.

Whether engaged in academic, social-emotional, or career programming, educators dealing with gifted youth who have diverse sexual orientations and gender identities should model fairness and sensitivity regarding the varied intersections of giftedness, sexual orientation, and gender identity. Because current school environments may not adequately support these students, pre-service and in-service teachers, counselors, and other educational professionals should receive training related to creating and sustaining safe and productive environments for these youth. A supportive school atmosphere encourages adult and student acceptance of others and creates an environment where *all* students gain self-understanding, feel pride, and further develop their gifts and talents.

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The National Association for Gifted Children (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 papers 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 Papers can be found at www.nagc.org.