

The nation's 3 million academically gifted and talented students depend on school leaders and classroom teachers to recognize their learning needs and to respond with a continuum of services that follows and grows with them throughout their school years.

Numerous misperceptions surrounding gifted learners impede services for many of our most academically promising students — such as gifted students are always the top performers in the classroom, or that gifted students can succeed on their own. The reality is that the gifted student population is very diverse, that talent within this population doesn't develop at the same time or rate or in every subject, and social and emotional issues may get in the way of learning. This means that schools must be vigilant in searching for advanced ability and flexible in their service delivery options.

Fortunately, gifted education services do not have to be expensive. However, they do require a leadership commitment to ensure that student engagement and achievement are the greatest priority. Creating a culture of excellence requires providing a challenging curriculum, well-trained teachers, and a clear school or district plan that ensures appropriate services. Gifted education strategies not only increase the achievement of gifted students, but also have been shown to increase achievement levels of all students, making their deployment well worth the investment.

NAGC provides comprehensive information to help those who are considering how to provide programs and services for gifted students so that the students may stretch their minds and reach for the highest levels of achievement.

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❑ How do we know that there are gifted students in our school?

There are gifted and talented students – those who perform or have the ability to perform at a level above and beyond their age and grade peers – in every cultural and economic group and from all backgrounds who need services to maximize their potential.

It is sometimes difficult to recognize these students because during the middle school years, some high-ability students will exhibit advanced performance in intellectual, creative, and/or artistic areas; others will just be beginning to develop their intellectual capacity and emotional maturity. Because of language issues, disabilities, and the impact of poverty or unchallenging elementary school programs, many diverse students have been overlooked for gifted and talented services. Additionally, behavior issues, such as failure to do homework or lack of school academic or activity participation, disguise the potential and hinder identification of other gifted students. However, students who process information quickly; ask complex questions; have long attention spans, good memories,



and strong vocabularies; or are very creative and curious should be assessed for giftedness.

Factors to consider:

- ❑ An estimated 6-10% of the student population is academically gifted; additional students may possess other forms of giftedness, such as creativity, visual and performing arts, and leadership.
- ❑ Approximately 9% of special education students are also gifted in one or more areas.

► How can we identify gifted students in our school?

Advanced academic performance alone or a single test score is an insufficient indicator for identifying high-ability students.

The use of multiple measures, including achievement and/or aptitude tests scores, teacher, parent, and student nominations; as well as students' grades and work, should also be used in the selection process. It is also critical that the identification process and selection criteria used be appropriate for the type of programs and services offered.

Factors to consider:

- To determine eligibility for gifted education services, educators should use multiple assessments that measure diverse abilities, talents, and strengths that are based on current theories, models, and research.
- To ensure that gifted education services reflect the district's student population, educators should use non-biased and equitable approaches for identifying students with gifts and talents, which may include using culturally sensitive checklists and locally developed norms or assessment tools in the



- child's native language or in nonverbal formats.
- Families are valuable partners in the identification process and should be included in all decisions made concerning assessment and services. Families can provide key information about children's interests and potential outside the classroom.

► How can we serve gifted and talented students in our school?

A variety of research-based gifted programming models and services can be used to challenge gifted students. Many of the strategies used with gifted students can be extended to more students, leading to increased achievement school-wide.

These services include various forms of enrichment, acceleration, and grouping options and may include extracurricular opportunities. Gifted children not only learn more rapidly than their peers, they learn differently and need teachers and administrators who are trained in both research-based identification practices and gifted education classroom and program strategies. Most experts recommend a

continuum of services that challenge gifted students across both the regular curriculum and a variety of program offerings, such as advanced content classes, independent study, and extensions of the regular curriculum.

Factors to consider:

- A guiding principle for academic decision making is to match instruction to student ability rather than to age.
- Service options should consider the social and emotional needs of gifted students who may underachieve, display perfectionism, experience negative peer pressure, or have extreme sensitivities and high levels of intensity. It is important that classroom teachers and other school

Resources

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About NAGC

The National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) is a nonprofit organization of parents, teachers, educators, and community leaders who work to expand support for 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 support.



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Maximizing Student Achievement

Identifying and Serving Gifted Students
in Middle School



What are the consequences of failing to meet the needs of gifted and high-potential students?

When high-ability middle school students are not challenged, they begin to think that being smart means that they don't have to work hard, which leads to poor learning skills and eventual underachievement and even failure in school.

Some families concerned about the availability of challenging content and rigorous instruction seek alternate options such as home- or private-schooling. Low-income students, however, are dependent on the public schools to meet their educational needs, meaning they may not be able to reach their true potential without services from their school.

Factors to consider:

- ▶ The "Excellence Gap," is growing in the middle grades between groups of students achieving the advanced level on the NAEP mathematics exam. For example:
 - ▶ The percentage of white students scoring at the advanced level on the grade 8 mathematics exam increased by 4.5% between 1998 and 2007; the percentage of Black and Hispanic students increased by only .8% and 1%.
 - ▶ Between 1996 and 2007, the percent of students eligible for free school lunches scoring at the advanced level on the 8th grade mathematics exam increased by .8 percentage point to 1.7%, while the percentage of students not eligible who scored at the advanced level increased by 5.7 percentage points to 10%.
- ▶ The middle school years can be socially challenging as well as a time when children begin to develop self-efficacy. Children not receiving an appropriate education or not grouped with intellectual peers may have trouble establishing positive feelings of self-worth both as members of the community and as students.
- ▶ Fewer than 1 in 4 teachers (23%) say that the needs of advanced students are a top priority at their school; 32% say that they are a low priority.
- ▶ Only 56% of children from low socio-economic backgrounds who are considered high achieving when they enter school, remain high achieving by the end of 5th grade. This means that there will be low-income students entering middle school whose performance is below their capabilities.
- ▶ Underachievement can be reversed with appropriate, strength-based interventions in student achievement, attitude, or behavior.

personnel create an accepting environment and take steps to prevent ridicule, bullying, and social isolation of gifted middle schoolers. Counselors should be experienced in working with high-ability adolescents, including providing college and career planning.

- ▶ 65% of teachers report that their pre-service education focused very little or not at all on how to best teach academically advanced students.
- ▶ Effective differentiation requires regular training and access to updated data on which to make decisions. One national study revealed that when gifted children are

in a regular classroom, gifted students received differentiated instruction just 16% of the time.

- ▶ Educational acceleration, which includes numerous strategies grouped generally as either content- or grade-based, is one of the cornerstones of exemplary gifted education practices, with a large body of research supporting its effectiveness.
- ▶ Flexible ability grouping in content areas has been shown to be effective in increasing achievement of all students, provided that the curriculum has been calibrated to each group's ability.

Serving gifted children does not have to be overly complicated or expensive. The NAGC website – <http://www.nagc.org> – contains much of the information needed, including National Gifted Education Programming Standards and research-based strategies upon which to build effective programs and services.