

Mandated Services for Gifted and Talented Students

Currently, whether gifted children's abilities are noticed and developed depends largely on where they live and which school they attend. This reality, which is counter the nation's equity and achievement goals, leads the National Association for Gifted Children to call for state mandates to identify and serve gifted and talented students and to fund the mandates at appropriate levels.

It is an unfortunate, yet commonly held belief that gifted students, by definition, are highly motivated, high achieving, and successful in school. Because of this, many schools do not recognize the need for specialized educational environments and instructional approaches such as acceleration that respond to their advanced learning capabilities and psycho-social needs. Well-resourced schools and districts often assume that they are doing enough for gifted students within their general curriculum and low resourced schools presume they have few, if any, gifted students. When budgets are tight, local school districts eliminate or reduce gifted programming believing that these students "will make it on their own." As a result of these and other factors, the potential of many gifted children goes unnoticed while others sit day in and day out in classrooms that stifle their motivation and limit their achievement.

How well are schools serving gifted children? While many students in the U.S. do well in advanced K-12 coursework and go on to success in graduate programs and beyond, a closer look at national and international data show that only small percentages of children in the U.S. reach the highest levels of achievement on national and international tests. Additionally, schooling does little to increase the progress of high achieving students and may not even support students to maintain high achievement. For minority and low-income students, the situation is acute; a dearth of these students reach advanced achievement levels, resulting in large "excellence" gaps at the top end of the achievement spectrum.

Currently, the U.S. has no federal law mandating the education of gifted children. Whether and how these students receive services in their local schools is dependent on state law and local policies and practices. More than 30 states mandate identification and/or services for gifted students (NAGC, 2011), although there is wide variability on policies regarding student identification, provision of gifted program services, teacher training, and other areas crucial to ensuring high quality gifted education. Additionally, it is not enough to mandate services if those mandates are unfunded. A reliable revenue source is necessary to ensure that student needs are met. However, in 2010–2011, only four states fully funded state mandates for gifted services, and between 2009 and 2011, 14 states decreased state funding for gifted education programs and services (NAGC, 2011).

To educate all of our children and allow them to compete in a global economy in all fields of human endeavor, the nation must provide an environment in which gifted and talented students, along with all our children, can reach their full potential. The National Association for Gifted Children recommends that gifted education services, including identification, educational programming and support services, and teacher training be mandated by legislation in all states and funded at appropriate levels. To do otherwise is to shortchange a significant segment of the K-12 population that deserves an appropriate education and can make important contributions to our society.

References and Resources

- National Association for Gifted Children, & Council of State Directors of Programs for the Gifted [NAGC]. (2011). *State of the states in gifted education 2010–2011*. Washington, DC: Author.
- National Center for Education Statistics. (2012). *The condition of education 2012*. Washington DC: Author.
- Olszewski-Kubilius, P., & Clarenbach, J. (2012). *Unlocking emergent talent: Supporting high achievement of low-income, high-ability students*. Washington, DC: National Association for Gifted Children.
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2010). *PISA 2009 results: What students know and can do—Student performance in reading, mathematics and science, Vol. 1*. Retrieved from www.oecd.org/edu/pisa/2009
- Plucker, J. S., Burroughs, N., & Song, R. (2010). *Mind the (other) gap! The growing excellence gap in K–12 education*. Bloomington: Indiana University, Center for Evaluation and Education Policy.
- Wyner, J. S., Bridgeland, J. M., & DiIulio, J. J. (2009). *Achievement trap: How America is failing millions of high-achieving students from lower-income families*. Lansdowne, VA: Jack Kent Cooke Foundation.
- Xiang, Y., Dahlin, M., Cronin, J., Theaker, R., & Durant, S. (2011). *Do high flyers maintain their altitude? Performance trends of top performers*. Washington DC: Thomas B. Fordham Institute.

Approved September 2013



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.