

Accountability for Gifted and Talented Student Learning

NAGC believes that schools, districts, and states should be accountable for the learning gains of all students, including gifted and talented learners from all socio-economic, racial, and ethnic subgroups.

Data related to the performance of top American students are of concern and have significant implications for U.S. competitiveness. Internationally, not only are top U.S. students scoring at or below average compared to peers in 34 countries in math, reading, and science, but the United States also has a below-average proportion of its students scoring at the highest level, as reported by the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA; OECD, 2013). Other nations are overtaking us as we stand still. Nationally, results on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP; NCES, 2013) exams in mathematics and reading indicate no significant improvement over time in the percentage of students scoring at advanced levels in any age group. While progress is being made in raising the achievement of students in the lowest 10%, the achievement of students in the top 10% is languishing. Large gaps persist at the advanced level of achievement on NAEP and on state assessments between socio-economic and racial subgroups. This “excellence gap” in achievement has serious implications for our ability to maintain a competitive workforce.

As states change standards and assessment systems and move to accountability focused on individual student growth, curriculum planning and measuring learning for students who are capable of performing beyond grade-level expectations have received little attention. To ensure gifted and talented and advanced students are making the expected learning gains, educators and policymakers should address the following:

- Instruments designed to assess student learning must have sufficiently high ceilings to accurately measure the learning gains of students who can demonstrate above-grade performance.
 - At the school and district level, this may involve the use of off- or above-grade level tests (e.g., employing those designed for older students or for higher grade levels with younger students) or computer adaptive tests. Assessments that provide a more accurate picture of students’ current level of achievement are needed to inform and guide placement and instruction. Data gleaned from assessments with sufficient ceiling to measure advanced skills and knowledge can be used to select appropriately advanced curriculum materials, guide content delivery methods, and design interventions matched to student needs.
- End-of-grade assessments for accountability must match the gifted student’s actual (i.e., accelerated) placement rather than the grade level expected based on his/her age.
- Assessment results must be reported publicly for gifted students and further disaggregated by subgroup.
 - Data on gifted children’s racial and ethnic identities, socioeconomic status, and other characteristics can be used at a school, district, or state level to inform key decisions. These include: appropriate gifted education services and program model for students and professional development needed by educators to effectively promote student learning growth and ensure both equitable and excellent services.

In summary, NAGC promotes accountability systems that support the adequate measurement and reporting of the learning growth of gifted learners from all socioeconomic, racial, and ethnic backgrounds. These accountability systems must include assessments that measure above-grade level achievement equitably and accurately, which can be used to better match curriculum and instruction to gifted students' needs, design programs and services, and inform professional development for educational personnel.

References

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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.