SPECIAL EDUCATION IN NORTH DAKOTA

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North Dakota Best Practices for Gifted Education

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The Department of Public Instruction appreciates the time and effort spent by the task force members in contributing to the development of this guidance document.

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ND Best Practices for Gifted Education was made possible through funding of the North Dakota Striving Readers Comprehensive Literacy Grant with a goal of improving literacy outcomes for all children from Birth through Grade 12. The grant prioritizes serving disadvantaged children including those from economically disadvantaged homes, those on individual education plans, those learning English, and those from minority communities.

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Publication Date: (June 2021) Cover artwork: Google Images - NHS West Kent

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Foreword

"I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me. Like the bodiless heads you see sometimes in circus sideshows, it is as though I have been surrounded by mirrors of hard, distorting glass. When they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves or figments of their imagination, indeed, everything and anything except me."
— Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*

Ralph Ellison exposes the experience of feeling invisible when others can only see you through the lens of their stereotypes. What makes his writing so remarkable is that while Ellison wrote about the topic of racial identity, he so acutely described the loneliness that cuts through the experience of the emerging identity that anyone who has ever felt alone or invisible could sympathize. Ellison showed that there is nothing more inhumane than to treat others as if they are invisible.

Incredibly, there are students who are still invisible in the classroom. We have already made great strides to see the needs of students who have disabilities, who come from different cultural backgrounds, or who have limited economic resources, to name a few. We can see better how these students struggle to find belonging in their classrooms. Who would ever believe that a student who thinks faster or more creatively or feels more deeply than others would also struggle to engage in the classroom experience? Cloaked in the stereotype that they can take care of themselves without any help, these gifted students are also an invisible minority in the classroom.

As you read these best practices for teaching and serving gifted students, keep in mind the words below by Del Siegle, former President of the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC), who made sure to spotlight the gifted students in the classroom. Thank you for learning more about how to teach and serve these students who will be invisible no more.

National Association for Gifted Children *Bill of Rights*

Gifted students have a right to:

- Know about their giftedness.
- Learn something new every day.
- Be passionate about their talent area without apologies.
- Have an identity beyond their talent area.
- Feel good about their accomplishments.
- Make mistakes.
- Seek guidance in the development of their talent.
- Have multiple peer groups and a variety of friends.
- Choose which of their talent areas they wish to pursue.
- Not be gifted at everything.

Written by Del Siegle, *NAGC President, 2007-2009*

Introduction

North Dakota Best Practices for Gifted Education is intended to serve as a guide for districts moving forward with equitable assessment and services for those students identified as gifted. North Dakota Best Practices for Gifted Education address the dynamic and ongoing process of identifying student gifts and talents, challenging students to become aware of their best potentials, and providing opportunities and services throughout the school program. North Dakota recognizes all students deserve access to a curriculum that is broad and rich in content.

These Best Practices are not intended to comprise a comprehensive textbook on gifted education. They will not take the place of careful study of the literature, nor are they intended to eliminate the need for the services of trained professionals at the local level.

Development and Use

National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) K-12 Programming Standards, endorsed by the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC), are the foundation for this document. NAGC Standards address Learning and Development, Assessment, Curriculum and Instruction, Learning Environment, Programming, and Professional Development.

Throughout this document, each NAGC standard has been addressed with key points highlighted to assist districts in gifted service development. As districts move forward with assessment, identification, and development of gifted services, they should keep in the mind the following recommendations:

- Districts should use an identification and assessment process that utilizes multiple measures, recognizes twice exceptional students, incorporates optional entry points, ensures equitable access to assessment, and recognizes local norms.

- Gifted educators should have the training necessary to recognize the need for an accelerated pace of instruction, the ability to develop rigorous learning environments, and the skills necessary to incorporate higher order creative thinking and questioning strategies into academic content.

- A district's gifted services and learning environments should use research-based curriculum and strategies and provide opportunities for gifted students to work with like-minded individuals.

  All district educators should be trained to identify the characteristics of gifted learners, including their social emotional and unique learning needs.

Rationale for Gifted Services

"Why is gifted education important?" The answer is quite clear: all students should be challenged to learn. Students learn best by interacting with and trying to make sense of content. When students come into the classroom with strong content knowledge or academic skills, the teacher should raise expectations so the student can experience learning as challenging, but achievable.

"What is gifted education?" Gifted education is a promise that each child will be challenged at an appropriate level. Gifted education is preparation for life, because all individuals need to be able to find strength in the face of challenges.

While many gifted children face challenges through external activities, learning should also take place in the classroom. Students spend more waking hours in the classroom than they do at home, and the classroom is a child's academic, social, emotional, and intellectual playground. For some students, the classroom may be the only place for needed enrichment and learning.

In the 2004 watershed report, *A Nation Deceived,* disparities between the research on acceleration, which run contrary to best practices, were exposed. It serves as a landmark report that provides evidence of how schools hold back America's brightest students:

> "What do America's brightest students hear? Every year, across the nation, students who should be moved ahead at their natural pace of learning are told to stay put. Thousands of students are told to lower their expectations and put their dreams on hold. Whatever they want to do, their teachers say, it can wait.
>
> Staying put is the wise move, many school districts say. That's what is best for the child.
>
> The problem is that it's not.
>
> Study after study tells us what so many bright but bored students already know—challenge is lacking in the regular classroom. We are deceiving ourselves when it comes to encouraging excellence. The way to promote excellence is to help it advance.
>
> Excellence begins with one word—yes.
>
> Yes to giving bright kids complex math problems. Yes to letting them learn another language. Yes to letting them accelerate to take classes that are ahead of their age group.
>
> Yes to letting them fly"
>
> (Colangelo et al., 2004, p. 3).

If all stakeholders understand that gifted education is fundamental to giving each child an appropriate learning experience, we will provide the field its essential place at the table.

Who are the Gifted?

A definition of giftedness is the foundation upon which an educational program for gifted students is built. Within the field, educational researchers put forth many definitions of giftedness. They may be categorized from a single measure of giftedness (IQ) to a broadened conception that includes multiple criteria. The specific abilities included in a definition determine the kinds of identification criteria that are used to select children for a program and the kinds of educational services that are provided to those children. There is a responsibility to provide optimal educational experiences for children who demonstrate high performance, or who have the potential to do so.

North Dakota Century Code §15.1-32-01 states: "Student who is gifted means an individual who is identified by qualified professionals as being capable of high performance and who needs educational programs and services beyond those normally provided in a regular education program."

The National Association for Gifted Children (2019) has released a position statement titled *Definition of Giftedness that Guides Best Practice* which provides the following definition:

"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 accommodations.
- 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.

Characteristics of Giftedness

While there are general gifted characteristics, each student presents a unique constellation of traits. At times there is more variability in the number and intensity of traits amongst gifted students than with the general population of students. According to the NAGC, gifted students may share some common characteristics that are listed below.

- **Cognitive characteristics**: keen power of abstraction, interest in problem-solving and applying concepts, voracious and early reader, large vocabulary, intellectual curiosity,

power of critical thinking, skepticism, self-criticism, persistent, goal-directed behavior, independence in work and study, and diversity of interests and abilities.

- **Creative characteristics**: creativeness and inventiveness, keen sense of humor, ability for fantasy, openness to stimuli, wide interests, intuitiveness, flexibility, independence in attitude and social behavior, self-acceptance and unconcern for social norms, radicalism, and aesthetic and moral commitment to self-selected work.
- **Affective characteristics**: unusual emotional depth and intensity, sensitivity or empathy to the feelings of others, high expectations of self and others often leading to feelings of frustration, heightened self-awareness accompanied by feelings of being different, easily wounded, need for emotional support, need for consistency between abstract values and personal actions, advanced levels of moral judgment, idealism, and sense of justice.
- **Behavioral characteristics**: spontaneity, boundless enthusiasm, intensely focused on passions, resists changing activities when engrossed in own interests, highly energetic, needs little sleep or down time, constantly questions, insatiable curiosity, impulsive, eager and spirited, perseverance, strong determination in areas of importance, high levels of frustration particularly when having difficulty meeting standards of performance (either imposed by self or others), volatile temper (especially related to perceptions of failure), and non-stop talking/chattering.

In addition, NAGC gives special consideration for social emotional issues and very young children:

- **Social Emotional Issues**: Because gifted students demonstrate greater maturity in some domains over others, they may be at greater risk for specific kinds of social-emotional difficulties if their needs are not met. These aspects may include heightened awareness, anxiety, perfectionism, stress, issues with peer relationships, and concerns with identity and belonging.
- **Very Young Children**: Young gifted learners are a heterogeneous group where each child develops skills and abilities at different rates; so, while one 4-year-old may be able to add and subtract numbers, he or she may struggle to draw a recognizable house or take turns on the swing.

Equity and Diversity

An understanding of equity and diversity is important for all educators of students with gifts and talents:

- "Equity is achieved by all students receiving the individual support they need in order to fully access the learning environment" (Wells, p.5, 2020).
- Respecting diversity means understanding that "outstanding talents are present in children and youth from all cultural groups, across all economic strata, and in all areas of human endeavor" (excerpt from the Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act of 1988).

Best practices incorporate equitable approaches throughout a district to identify populations that are frequently hidden or under-identified through universal screening, local norms, multiple assessments, multiple nomination sources, and through cultivating relationships with students to understand their unique challenges and needs. This includes using a process of identification which takes into consideration the culture, language proficiency and development in first and second languages, prior schooling, and parent/teacher interview(s) or behavioral inventories.

North Dakota Best Practices for Gifted Education: Learning and Development

NAGC Standard 1. Learning and Development
Educators understand the variations in learning and development in cognitive, affective, and psychosocial areas between and among individuals with gifts and talents, creating learning environments that encourage awareness and understanding of interest, strengths, and needs; cognitive growth, social and emotional; and psychosocial skill development in school, home, and community settings.

Learning and Development

The foundation for effective learning and development of gifted students includes educators who understand the characteristics and needs of their gifted population when planning curriculum, instruction, assessment, programs, and services. Educators should understand the learning ***and*** developmental differences of students with gifts and talents.

These elements provide the rationale for differentiation in programs, grouping, and services for this population and are translated into appropriate choices made at curricular and program levels in schools and school districts.

While cognitive and academic growth are important in such programs, affective development, which pertains to the social-emotional needs of the gifted student, is also necessary. Thus, many of the characteristics addressed in this guide emphasize affective development linked to self-understanding and social awareness.

Students with gifts and talents need to develop self-understanding of their interests, strengths, and needs in cognitive, creative, social, emotional, and psychological areas. To exhibit deeper self-understanding, students with gifts and talents should develop an awareness of how they learn and recognize the influences of their identities, cultures, beliefs, traditions, and values on their learning and behavior.

To assist students in the area of affective development, educators effectively:

- Engage students in identifying interests, strengths, or needs as well as intellectual, academic, creative, leadership, and/or artistic abilities.
- Engage students in cognitively appropriate activities that align with their readiness to foster student growth.
- Engage students as partners to discover their strengths, talents, and social/emotional needs.
- Engage students in developing growth-aligned goals and a growth mindset (e.g., offer support for perceived failures along with positive feedback).
- Engage students in activities that match culture-based learning needs, respect different cultures and values, and address stereotypes and biases.

Students with gifts and talents will benefit by developing an understanding of, and respect for, similarities and differences between themselves and their cognitive and chronological peer groups and others in the general population.

To assist students in developing an understanding of these similarities and differences, educators effectively:

- Use evidence-based instructional and homogeneous grouping practices to allow students with similar gifts, talents, abilities, and strengths to learn together (e.g. cluster groups, pull-out groups, interest groups).
- Foster understanding of individuals with various gifts, talents, abilities, strengths, and goals for the purpose of developing respect for individuals with diverse abilities, interests, strengths, learning needs, and goals.
- Use differentiated materials and instructional activities matched to varied abilities, interests, and learning needs of students.

It is necessary for students with gifts and talents to develop self-advocacy skills.

To assist with self-advocacy skills, educators effectively:

- Promote access to role models for students with gifts and talents that match their interests, strengths, and needs.
- Help students to identify outside-of-school learning opportunities and community resources that match their interests, strengths, and needs.
- Gather information and inform students, and their families, about resources available to develop their talents.

It is necessary for students with gifts and talents to demonstrate cognitive and academic growth as well as psychosocial skills that support their talent development as a result of meaningful and challenging learning activities that address their unique characteristics and needs.

To assist with demonstrating students' cognitive and academic growth and psychosocial skills, educators effectively:

- Use evidence-based grouping approaches, which promote cognitive and academic growth as well as psychosocial and social-emotional skill development.
- Design instructional interventions based on the research of effective practices and differentiate for learning differences to develop cognitive, academic, and affective abilities that support growth and achievement.
- Develop specialized, research-supported intervention services for the diverse needs of students with gifts and talents [e.g., underachieving, twice-exceptional, English-language learner (ELL), socio-economic status, etc.].

Students with gifts and talents need ongoing, developmentally appropriate guidance and instruction to identify future career goals that match their interests and strengths and in order to determine resources needed to meet those goals (e.g., supplemental educational opportunities, mentors, Talent Search, financial support, etc.).

To assist students in this area, educators effectively:

- Seek out a team of professionals (e.g., school/career counselors, mentors, etc.) who assist with postsecondary career planning and connect students to college and career resources.
- Help students identify college and career goals that are consistent with their interests and strengths.
- Implement learning plans which incorporate personal/social awareness and adjustment, academic planning, psychosocial skill development, and college and career awareness.

North Dakota Best Practices for Gifted Education: Assessment

NAGC Standard 2. Assessment
Assessments provide information about identification and learning progress for students with gifts and talents.

Assessment

"Assessment is a process that is used to gather information using effective tests, instruments, and techniques for a particular purpose such as screening, classification or selection, curriculum planning, learning progress evaluation, and program evaluation" (Johnsen, 2012, p. 71). This information is used to 1) identify students who need gifted services; 2) monitor individual needs; and 3) provide evidence of growth. All forms of assessment are coordinated to create a decision-making process that informs an equitable delivery of services. NAGC offers guidance on **principles**, **processes**, and **non-negotiables** for assessment.

Principles that inform effective identification practices:

- Gifts and talents are dynamic and are developed over time.
- Early identification improves the likelihood that gifts will develop into talents.
- Students exhibit their gifts and talents not only within a specific domain, but also within an interest area.
- Giftedness is exhibited across all diverse groups.

Processes to identify students who may be gifted:

- Phase 1: PRE-Referral phase to observe behaviors and include parents/guardians in the observation process.
- Phase 2: Nomination phase to consider ALL students.
- Phase 3: Screening and Identification phase to universally screen ALL students.
- Phase 4: Selection and placement phase. The Multidisciplinary Team (MDT) makes a selection and placement of the gifted student.

Non-negotiables for identification:

- Choice of assessment tools should match the definition of giftedness that has been determined by the state, district, or school. Validity assessments used in the identification process should be aligned with the gifted program's goals and objectives, desired outcomes, and consideration of program goals before selecting tools.
- Identification of gifted and talented students should be based on the results of multiple assessments (e.g., cognitive, academic, profile of gifted characteristics, etc.).

- The assessment conditions should mimic as closely as possible a natural setting in which the student can fully demonstrate his or her knowledge, skills, and abilities.
- District personnel should be well-informed consumers regarding the technical documentation of each assessment used for identification (i.e., it is imperative to identify the reliability and validity of an assessment PRIOR to use).
- District personnel should ensure that persons **or** agencies who administer and score assessments used for identification are appropriately trained and that placement decisions are driven by defensible data and not based on personal relationships, political associations, or parental pressure.

All students with gifts and talents in Pre-K through grade 12 have ***equal access*** to the identification process and proportionally represent each campus.

To provide equal access, districts effectively:

- Use universal screening and ***multiple indicators*** (e.g., cognitive, behavioral observations, achievement, and performance evaluations) of potential and achievement at various grade levels from Pre-K through grade 12 to provide multiple entry points to services.
- Apply building norms to interpret the results of universal screenings.
- Develop diagnostic environments and instructional activities that prepare and encourage students from diverse backgrounds to express characteristics and behaviors that are associated with giftedness for the purpose of gathering observational data.
- Engage parents, in their preferred language, in the identification process (e.g., observational checklists, submitting children's work, parent meeting).
- Provide information on gifted services and identification protocols at the district level (e.g., brochure, district website, North Dakota Department of Public Instruction (NDDPI) reporting).
- Provide parents/guardians with information, in their preferred language, regarding behaviors and characteristics associated with giftedness and with information that explains the nature and purpose of gifted programming services.

Students with gifts and talents are identified for services that match their interests, strengths, and needs. The following procedures should be considered as part of the process: referral, informed consent, assessment process, assessment information, student retention, student reassessment, student exiting, and appeals procedures for both entry and exit from gifted programming and services.

To effectively identify students, educators effectively:

- Select and use assessments which **align to the services** provided and identify abilities, interests, strengths, and needs based on current research.
- Establish comprehensive, cohesive, and transparent policies and procedures for the ongoing identification and service of students with gifts and talents.

- Use assessments which provide qualitative and quantitative information from a variety of sources.
- Use assessments with a high ceiling which offer information related to above-grade-level performance.
- Select assessments which minimize bias (i.e., information in the technical manual that describes content in terms of potential bias, includes norms that match national census information or local populations, shows how items discriminate equally well, and provides separate reliability and validity information).
- Have knowledge of student exceptionalities and collect assessment data while adjusting curriculum and instruction to learn about each student's developmental level and aptitude for learning (i.e., dynamic assessment).
- Interpret multiple assessments in different domains and understand the uses and limitations of the assessments in identifying the interests, strengths and needs of students with gifts and talents.
- Inform and include parents/guardians throughout the identification process (e.g., obtain parental/guardian permission for assessments, use culturally sensitive checklists, elicit evidence regarding the child's interests and potential outside of the classroom setting).

Students with gifts and talents represent diverse backgrounds, therefore equitable identification opportunities should be implemented.

So that identification opportunities represent diverse backgrounds, educators effectively:

- Select and use equitable approaches and assessments which minimize bias for referring and identifying students with gifts and talents, attending to segments of the population that are frequently hidden or under-identified (e.g., pre-referral talent development activities, universal screening, using locally developed norms, assuring assessment tools are in the student's preferred language for communication or nonverbal formats, building relationships with students to understand their unique challenges and needs, etc.).
- Understand and implement district, state, and/or national policies designed to foster equity in gifted programming and services.

Students with gifts and talents should demonstrate appropriate growth in cognitive, social-emotional, and psychosocial areas.

So that students can demonstrate growth, educators effectively:

- Use formative assessments to differentiate learning experiences that challenge students (e.g., product-based and performance-based assessments, etc.).
- Use standardized (e.g., adaptive, above-grade-level, etc.) and classroom assessments to measure students' academic progress.
- Use and interpret qualitative and quantitative assessment data to inform instruction.

- Provide opportunities for students to be responsible for their own learning (e.g., set personal goals, keep records, and monitor their own learning progress).
- Interpret and communicate assessment information to students and their parents/guardians in their preferred language.

North Dakota Best Practices for Gifted Education: Curriculum Planning & Instruction

NAGC Standard 3. Curriculum & Instruction
Educators apply evidence-based models of curriculum and instruction related to students with gifts and talents and respond to their needs by planning, selecting, adapting, and creating curriculum that is responsive to diversity. Educators use a repertoire of instructional strategies to ensure specific student outcomes and measurable growth.

Curriculum Planning & Instruction

Curriculum Planning and Instruction for meeting the unique needs of students with gifts and talents is the foremost component of gifted education. To ensure student growth, it is imperative that teachers of gifted students have specialized knowledge and training when designing and implementing instruction. Differentiation for gifted learners encompasses planning for both short term (i.e., daily) and long term (i.e., across grades) needs.
"The process of differentiation is the deliberate adaptation and modification of the curriculum, instructional processes, and assessments to respond to the needs of gifted learners" (VanTassel-Baska, 2012, p 98).

Curriculum Planning

Providing rigor assists students to think more deeply and to perform and grow at higher levels. Rigor is the foundation of gifted education; therefore, it is imperative for educators of gifted students to have a sound understanding of rigor and possess a repertoire of evidence-based instructional strategies and curriculum to support those strategies.

When planning for gifted instruction, educators:

- Use evidence-based curricular resources that are effective in promoting rigorous learning experiences for students with gifts and talents.
- Use high-quality, appropriately challenging, and rigorous materials that include diverse voices and perspectives.
- Accelerate the pace and depth of instruction based on the learning needs of gifted students (i.e., gifted students master concepts more quickly, learn with fewer repetitions or instruction, and are able to gain an understanding of multiple concepts in one setting).
- Provide a variety of acceleration opportunities (e.g., early entrance to school, subject acceleration, grade acceleration, and dual enrollment in college).
- Integrate a variety of technologies for students to construct knowledge, solve problems, communicate, and express themselves creatively, and collaborate with others in relevant and meaningful ways with real-world applications.

- Promote real-world learning experiences through using school and community resources to support differentiation and advanced instruction appropriate to students' interests, strengths, and academic learning needs.

Gifted education curriculum should emphasize advanced, conceptually challenging, in-depth, and complex content that differentiates, accelerates, and/or expands local, state, and national standards.

When planning for gifted instruction, educators:

- Recognize, support, and modify for individual instructional needs of gifted students.
- Have understanding and training in how to develop and design rigorous curriculum that allows for differentiation according to personalized learning needs.
- Differentiate instruction to align, expand, enrich, and/or accelerate curriculum and instructional plans.
- Differentiate to meet the unique learning styles, learning rates, interests, abilities, and needs of gifted and talented students.
- Require commitment and support of adequate professional time to plan for the advanced learning and unique individual needs of gifted students.
- Should expect instructional staff, administrative staff, and board members to demonstrate commitment to support the planning process for gifted students.

Curriculum, instructional strategies, materials, and resources should demonstrate best practices that are responsive to diversity to engage a variety of gifted learners.

When planning for gifted instruction, educators:

- Adapt, modify, or replace the core or standard curriculum to meet the interests, strengths, and needs of students with gifts and talents and those with special needs such as twice exceptional, highly gifted, and ELLs.

Instructional Strategies

Educators should incorporate models of inquiry to engage students in critical thinking, creative thinking, and problem-solving strategies, particularly in their domain(s) of talent; both to reveal and address the needs of gifted students.

Instruction provides gifted students opportunities to apply critical thinking skills, deductive and inductive reasoning, inquiry, and logic through a variety of models.

Gifted students should receive differentiated instruction that keeps them on a path of continuous learning to ensure a minimum of one year's growth for every year spent in school. Differentiated instruction usually occurs in flexible small groups within the regular classroom or regular instructional time.

The key principles of differentiated instruction include:

- Pre-assessment, formative assessment, and summative assessment results used to shape future instructional decisions.
- Student-centered instructional practices and materials that are standards-based and grounded in research.
- Instruction that has clear objectives with focused activities to reach the objectives.
- Multiple avenues for students to show mastery of essential content and skills and to demonstrate their learning and varied pacing, depth, and complexity (Iowa, p.9).
- Observations and assessments of each student's progress are based on the student's potential.
- Students are provided opportunities to monitor and reflect on their own learning progress.

Educators need to possess and implement a repertoire of evidence-based instructional strategies while delivering the curriculum:

- To develop students' talents, enhance learning, and provide students with the knowledge and skills to become independent, self-aware learners.
- To give students the tools to contribute to a diverse and global society.
- To employ models of inquiry which engage students in critical thinking, creative thinking, and problem-solving strategies.
- To teach thinking skills through the lens of the discipline or domain (e.g., critical thinking, deductive and inductive reasoning, inquiry, and logic).

The curriculum, instructional strategies, materials, and resources should engage a variety of gifted learners using practices that are responsive to diversity. Educators are encouraged to use a repertoire of instructional strategies to ensure specific student outcomes and measurable growth.

In addition, educators are able to differentiate their curriculum and instruction by:

- Using data from pre- and post-assessments.
- Performance-based assessments.
- Product-based assessments.
- Other assessments that measure student growth.

As a result of each educator's use of ongoing assessments, gifted and talented students are aware of their learning progress and are able to demonstrate growth commensurate with their abilities.

North Dakota Best Practices for Gifted Education: Learning Environments

NAGC Standard 4. Learning Environments
Learning environments foster a love for learning, personal and social responsibility, multicultural competence, and interpersonal and technical communication skills for leadership to ensure specific student outcomes.

Learning Environments

The needs of gifted students, and in particular highly gifted students, are unique and complex. Their needs for intellectual, psychological, emotional, personal, and interpersonal growth are inextricably linked. An appropriate gifted learning environment addresses these needs in the delivery of instruction. A learning environment has "two major components: the physical one, which includes the classrooms, teaching materials, and learning facilities, and the psychosocial component, which relates to the interactions between students and students, students and teachers, and students with the environment" (Fraser as cited in Miedijensky, 2018, p. 227).

Teachers who foster engaging learning environments for gifted students address students' multiple needs in tandem and offer additional support that helps gifted students understand and develop their creative and leadership potential within a diverse society. Appropriate school environments for students with gifts and talents foster academic growth, emotional well-being, positive social interaction, responsibility, creativity, leadership development, and understanding for success in a diverse society.

Gifted students need learning environments which:

- Recognize their unique strengths, talents, and interests.
- Help manage tendencies toward unhealthy perfectionism which can interfere with academic and social/emotional growth.
- Challenge them to take academic risks.
- Provide support as they persevere and work through new learning challenges.
- Accelerate their pace and/or level of instruction.
- Ensure a rigorous and engaging learning experience.
- Enhance their cognitive, psychosocial, and social-emotional growth.
- Respect their intense need to explore topics of interest and social issues.

Educators create a learning environment which:

- Helps gifted students develop personal, social, leadership, cultural, and communication competencies.
- Promotes high expectations, advanced rigor, and opportunities for students to reach their potential.
- Provides support for perceived failures.
- Provides positive feedback.
- Establishes trust and support.
- Incorporates advanced language, vocabulary, and communication skills to impact gifted student development.
- Uses relevant strategies and technologies to enhance oral, written, and artistic communication for students whose needs vary in ability, language proficiency, or cultural and linguistic differences.
- Respects different cultures and values.
- Addresses stereotypes and biases.

Personal Responsibility and Leadership Skills

Students with gifts and talents should have the opportunity to develop personal competence in both academics and creativity. The following skills should be considered to assist in developing students' responsibility and leadership skills: self-awareness, self-advocacy, self-efficacy, confidence, motivation, resilience, independence, curiosity, and risk taking.

To develop student's responsibility and leadership skills, educators effectively:

- Maintain high expectations through meaningful and challenging activities.
- Promote relevant, real world problem solving to promote personal growth, social responsibility, and leadership.
- Provide rigorous learning opportunities to promote cognitive development and social-emotional growth.
- Demonstrate appreciation and sensitivity to cultural diversity and social-economic communities.
- Promote perseverance, resilience, and risk taking to develop student potential to meet high standards and view mistakes as learning opportunities.

Social and Cultural Skills

Students with gifts and talents develop social competence manifested in positive peer relationships and social interactions.

To develop student's social and cultural skills, educators effectively:

- Implement rigorous opportunities to enhance and expand gifted student abilities and talents.
- Facilitate rigorous opportunities to learn with other gifted students and/or like-minded peers.
- Provide safe learning environments that foster academic achievement and emotional well-being.
- Exemplify appreciation and sensitivity for students' diverse backgrounds and languages.
- Provide opportunities to communicate and collaborate with diverse individuals and diverse cultures.
- Utilize positive strategies to address social issues.

Communication Skills

Educators use relevant strategies and technologies to enhance oral, written, and artistic communication of students whose needs vary based on area(s) and level(s) of ability, language proficiency, and cultural and linguistic differences. Effective educators recognize the value of multilingualism in today's global community.

To develop students' communication skills, educators effectively:

- Provide opportunities that enhance oral, written, and artistic forms of communication to express their thinking with purpose and for an audience.
- Provide opportunities for gifted students to effectively express higher-level thinking and creative productivity.
- Provide an environment where students use technology to communicate responsibly and express themselves using the platforms, tools, styles, formats, and digital media appropriate to their goals.

North Dakota Best Practices for Gifted Education: Services & Programming

NAGC Standard 5. Programming
Educators use evidence-based practices to promote (a) the cognitive, social-emotional, and psychosocial skill development of students with gifts and talents and (b) programming that meets their interests, strengths, and needs. Educators make use of expertise systematically and collaboratively to develop, implement, manage, and evaluate services for students with a variety of gifts and talents to ensure specific student outcomes.

Services & Programming

Service delivery models provide students who are identified as gifted with intellectual, academic, creative, leadership, and/or artistic opportunities. A variety of instructional opportunities and a continuum of services are essential to address gifted student needs for increased pace, acceleration, and extensions through depth and complexity. Service delivery models enhance student performance in cognitive, psychosocial, and social-emotional areas and assist them in identifying future postsecondary and career goals and talent development pathways.

Programming refers to a continuum of services that address the interests, strengths, and needs of gifted students in all settings. To ensure specific student outcomes and continuous growth, districts need to develop programming and service policies and procedures for gifted students in Pre-K through grade 12. Gifted services provide learning environments that are adequately staffed and funded to meet gifted students' academic and social emotional needs.

Best practices for Gifted Services and Programming include:

- Individualized learning options.
- Multiple approaches to accelerate learning.
- Enrichment options to extend and deepen learning opportunities.
- Evidence-based grouping, including clusters, resource rooms, special classes, or special schools.
- Current technologies to increase access to high level programming such as online courses outside of the school walls.
- Support and sustained training, funding, and resources to facilitate program needs.

Gifted learning environments, delivery models, and service opportunities can be considered in order of impact, and research indicates that, "...an average of one third to one half an additional year's achievement growth (effect size [ES] = .34 to .49) should be possible within the school program of talent development when the child participates in the growth area on a daily basis" (Rogers, 2007, p. 383).

The Gifted Services below are ranked in order of Effect Size:

- **Whole Grade Acceleration** - Grade skipping is cutting a full year, or more, from the usual number of years typically required to progress from kindergarten to high school graduation. [ES] = 1.00
- **Curriculum Compacting** - Curriculum compacting is streamlining the regular curriculum to "buy time" for enrichment, accelerated content, or independent study. Use of assessment tools to identify standards mastered and move students to next level of instruction. [ES] = .83 Math/Science; .26 Language Arts/Social Studies
- **Pull-Out Cluster Groupings** - Identifies gifted students based on specific academic needs. Students work with a GT trained educator and receive regular scheduled services in their identified area. [ES] = .65
- **School-Wide Cluster Model** - Cluster grouping is the practice of identifying a small group of academically talented or intellectually gifted students at a grade level and placing them in the same classroom with a teacher trained to differentiate curriculum and instruction. Classroom educators have access to materials, support and training in meeting the needs of gifted students, curriculum compacting, and training and support from GT specialists. [ES] = .62
- **Single Subject Acceleration** - Based on assessment, acceleration can be done for an identified academic area allowing students to move more quickly through the progression of skills and content mastery in one subject where great advancement or proficiency has been observed. [ES] = .59
- **Mentorship** - Establishment of a one-on-one relationship between a student and an outside-of-school expert in a specific topic area or career. [ES] = .57
- **School Within a School** - Gifted students are placed in self-contained classes in every grade level in an otherwise heterogeneous school. [ES] = .49
- **Early Entrance Acceleration** - Early entrance is the practice of admitting a child to school at an age earlier than usually allowed by the district. [ES] = .49
- **Cross-Grade grouping** - Grouping children by achievement level in a subject area rather than by grade. [ES] = .45
- **Dual Enrollment** - Dual enrollment allows high school students to take college classes while they are still enrolled in high school. These classes count for both high school and college credit. [ES] = .32
- **AP: Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate Classes** - Provision of a course with advanced or accelerated content at the secondary school level, affording students the opportunity to "test out" of, or be given credit for the completion of, college-level coursework. [ES] = .29

- **Similar Ability Cooperative Groups** - Organizing groups of learners in three four-member teams of similar ability and adjusting the group task accordingly. [ES] = .26

When considering effect size, the following services are **not recommended for gifted students**:

- **Mixed Ability Cooperative Groups** - Organizing groups of learners in three four-member teams of mixed ability to achieve a common goal. Gifted students are typically responsible for their teammates' learning as well as their own (e.g., academic and curricular group projects) [ES] = .00
- **Peer to Peer Tutoring** - Peer tutoring is a flexible, peer-mediated strategy that involves students serving as academic tutors and tutees. Typically, a higher performing student is paired with a lower performing student to review critical, academic, or behavioral concepts. [ES] = .00

Successful planning, development, and implementation of district-gifted services requires collaboration and support at all levels. Districts should support the resources and time needed to develop, implement, and assess services provided. Administrators should allocate sufficient resources for programming options and evaluation activities so all students with gifts and talents receive appropriate educational services. Educators in gifted, general, or special education programs, and in related professional services, collaborate with one another and with students, parents/guardians, advocates, and community members to ensure that students' diverse interests, strengths, and needs are met.

To provide gifted services, educators effectively:

- Develop a Pre-K through grade 12 continuum of programming and services in relevant student talent areas that is responsive to students' different levels of need for intervention.
- Collaborate with gifted, general, special, and related professional services to plan, develop, implement, manage, and evaluate programming and services for gifted students.
- Provide professional guidance and counseling for individual students regarding their interests, strengths, challenges, needs, and values.

To provide district-gifted services, administrators effectively:

- Hire educators with both an endorsement in gifted education and an understanding of the issues affecting gifted students.
- Ensure equitable allocation of resources so all gifted students receive consistent educational services aligned to their interests, strengths, and needs.
- Verify appropriate and sufficient funding for staffing, curriculum, materials, gifted programming, and services.

Districts develop clear policies and procedures that provide for gifted students' advanced learning needs (e.g., early entrance, acceleration, etc.) and assessment of student growth and program efficacy. School policymakers create and approve evidence-based policies and

procedures to guide and sustain all components of the program, including assessment, identification, acceleration, and grouping practices.

To provide gifted services, districts effectively:

- Create and approve evidence-based policies and procedures to guide and sustain all components of the program, including assessment, identification, acceleration, and grouping practices.
- Use reliable and valid assessments to evaluate the quantity and quality of gifted programming, services, and yearly progress.
- Provide the necessary time and resources to implement an annual evaluation plan developed by persons with expertise in program evaluation and gifted education.
- Evaluate how student-level outcomes are influenced by fidelity of implementation in the following components of gifted education programming:
    - Identification.
    - Curriculum.
    - Instructional programming and services.
    - Ongoing assessment of student learning.
    - Counseling and guidance programs.
    - Teacher qualifications and professional learning.
    - Parent/guardian and community involvement.
    - Programming resources.
    - Programming design, management, and delivery.
    - School equity efforts for underrepresented students.
- Ensure that the assessments used in program evaluation are reliable and valid for the purposes for which they are being used.

Districts should also provide the time and resources necessary to implement an annual evaluation, developed by persons with expertise in program evaluation and gifted education, to assess the quantity and quality of programming and services provided and make the results public.

North Dakota Best Practices for Gifted Education:

Professional Learning

NAGC Standard 6. Professional Learning
All educators (administrators, teachers, counselors, and other instructional support staff) build their knowledge and skills using the NAGC-CEC Teacher Preparation Standards in Gifted and Talented Education, (NAGC-CEC) Advanced Standards in Gifted Education Teacher Preparation, and the Standards for Professional Learning. Institutions of higher education utilize these standards and the NAGC Faculty Standards to ensure quality professional learning experiences in pre-service, initial, and advanced educator preparation programs. Educators frequently assess their professional learning needs related to the standards, develop and monitor their professional learning plans, systematically engage in coaching and learning to meet their identified needs, and align outcomes with educator performance and student curriculum standards. Administrators assure educators have access to sustained, intensive, collaborative, job-embedded, and data-driven learning, and they assure adequate resources to provide for release time, to fund continuing education, and to offer substitute support. The effectiveness of professional learning is assessed through relevant student outcomes.

Professional Learning

Professional learning is essential for all educators involved in the development and implementation of gifted programs and services. It is essential because giftedness is a cognitively complex phenomenon central to which is asynchronous development.

In 1991, the Columbus Group defined it well:

> *"Giftedness is asynchronous development in which advanced cognitive abilities and heightened intensity combine to treat inner experiences and awareness that are qualitatively different from the norm. This asynchrony increases with higher intellectual capacity. The uniqueness of the gifted renders them particularly vulnerable and requires modifications in parenting, teaching and counseling in order for them to develop optimally."*

Professional learning is key to understanding the needs of these students. Best practices dictate that the professional learning should be the intentional, sustained development of professional expertise as outlined by NAGC-CEC. Not only do gifted and talented teachers need to expand their professional knowledge, but general education teachers need instruction and coaching to recognize the characteristics of giftedness, understand the district referral and identification process, and implement an array of high quality, evidence-based practices that challenge all students including those with gifts and talents.

Gifted and Talented Development

Students identify and fully develop their talents and gifts as a result of interacting with educators who possess content pedagogical knowledge and meet national teacher preparation standards in gifted education and the Standards for Professional Learning.

To increase pedagogical knowledge, educators effectively:

- Access high-quality professional learning delivered by those with expertise in gifted education as guided by the NAGC-CEC Teacher Preparation Standards in Gifted and Talented Education.
- Become skillful at the teacher preparation standards in gifted education and can demonstrate mastery and implementation of them. At a minimum this includes understanding:
    - Foundations of gifted education.
    - Characteristics of diverse students with gifts and talents and programming for them.
    - Identification.
    - Assessment.
    - Curriculum planning and instruction.
    - Learning environments.
    - Programming.
    - Twice exceptional students.
    - Social issues.
    - Equity and access.
- Use their awareness of local, state, and national organizations and publications relevant to gifted education to promote learning for students with gifts and talents and their families.

To assist educators in growing their pedagogical knowledge, administrators effectively:

- Plan for, budget, and provide sufficient human and material resources needed for professional learning in gifted education (e.g., release time, funding for continuing education, substitute support, webinars, and/or mentors).
- Access Title I, Title II, and Title IV funds as allowed under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) to meet this expectation. For more information related to Federal Title Programs see the NDDPI website.

Psychosocial and Social-Emotional Development

Students with gifts and talents develop critical psychosocial skills and show social-emotional growth as a result of educators and counselors who have participated in professional learning aligned with National Standards in Gifted Education and Standards for Professional Learning.

To assist students with psychosocial skills and social-emotional learning, educators effectively:

- Participate in ongoing professional learning to understand and apply research to their teaching with regard to psychosocial skills necessary for the development of gifts and talents and social-emotional development of individuals with gifts and talents.

Equity and Inclusion

All students with gifts and talents are able to develop their abilities as a result of educators who are committed to removing barriers to access and creating inclusive gifted education communities.

To increase equity and inclusion, educators effectively:

- Participate in professional learning focused on curriculum and pedagogy that are responsive to diversity for individuals with gifts and talents.
- Recognize their biases, develop philosophies responsive to diversity, commit themselves to removing barriers, and create inclusive learning environments that meet the educational interests, strengths, and needs of diverse students with gifts and talents.
- Understand how knowledge, perspectives, and historical and current issues influence professional practice and the education and treatment of individuals with gifts and talents both in school and in society.

Lifelong Learning

Students develop their gifts and talents as a result of educators who are lifelong learners, participating in ongoing professional learning and continuing education opportunities.

To increase lifelong learning, educators effectively:

- Reflect on and assess their instructional practices, develop professional learning plans, and improve their practices by participating in continuing education opportunities.
- Participate in professional learning that is sustained over time; incorporates collaboration and reflection; is goal-aligned and data-driven; is coherent, embedded, and transferable;

includes regular follow-up; and seeks evidence of positive impact on teacher practice and on increased student learning.

Ethics

All students with gifts and talents, including those who may be twice exceptional, English language learners, or who come from underrepresented populations, receive equal opportunities to be identified and served in high-quality gifted programming as a result of educators who are guided by ethical practices.

To increase ethical practices, educators effectively:

- Use professional ethical principles and specialized program standards to guide their practice.
- Comply with rules, policies, and standards of ethical practice and advocate for rules, policies, and standards that promote equity and access.

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