

Section 3 – Primary Talent Pool

The Primary Talent Pool should include about 25% of primary students. The idea of “casting a wide net” allows schools to nurture a larger number of high potential learners through the primary years. This is particularly important for children who have little or no support at home. Research shows that students whose gifts have not been nurtured begin to underachieve at least by the third grade. When more students are nurtured through the primary years, more gifted children can be formally identified later.

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Sections of the 704 KAR 3:285 Programs for the Gifted and Talented Related to the Primary Talent Pool

Section 1. Definitions #:

(19) *"High potential learners" means those students who typically represent the top quartile (twenty-five (25) percent) of the entire student population in terms of the degree of demonstrated gifted characteristics and behaviors and require differentiated service experiences to further develop their interests and abilities.*

(21) *"Informal selection" means a process by which a student in the primary program is documented as having the characteristics and behaviors of a high potential learner in one (1) or more categories using a series of informal measures for the purpose of determining eligibility for the talent pool.*

(25) *"Primary review committee" means primary teachers, counselors, administrators, gifted education personnel, and other appropriate personnel familiar with the child's potential or demonstrated abilities.*

(31) *"Talent pool" means a group of primary students informally selected as having characteristics and behaviors of a high potential learner and further diagnosed using a series of informal and formal measures to determine differentiated service delivery needs during their stay in the primary program.*

Section 3. Identification and Diagnosis of Gifted Characteristics, Behaviors, and Talent and Determination of Eligibility for Services.

(1) A district shall adopt policies and procedures which shall provide for identification and diagnosis of strengths, gifted behaviors and talents through:

(a) Informal selection and diagnosis in the primary program;

(c) Provision of multiple service delivery options in primary through grade twelve (12).

(7) In the primary program, formal, normed measures may be used for diagnosing the level of instructional service needed by a student and for evaluation of student progress. Data from formal, normed measures shall not be used for the purpose of eliminating eligibility for services to a child in the primary program but may be used to discover and include eligible students overlooked by informal assessment.

(8) A single assessment instrument or measure shall not be the basis for denying services once a child has been informally selected and placed in the talent pool.

(9) For children in the primary program, the procedure for selecting a high potential learner for participation in the primary talent pool shall include use of a minimum of three (3) of the following recognized or acceptable assessment options to assess the degree of demonstrated gifted characteristics and behaviors and to determine level of need and most appropriate service interventions:

(a) A collection of evidence (e.g., primary portfolios) demonstrating student performance;

(b) Inventory checklists of behaviors specific to gifted categories;

(c) Diagnostic data;

(d) Continuous progress data;

(e) Anecdotal records;

(f) Available formal test data;

(g) Parent interview or questionnaire;

(h) Primary review committee recommendation;

(i) Petition system; and

(j) Other valid and reliable documentation.

(10) Exit from the primary program shall be based on criteria established by 703 KAR 4:040.

Section 4. Procedure for Determining Eligibility for Services.

- (1) Identification of gifted characteristics, behaviors and talent shall be based on the following process:
 - (a) Data gathering. A district shall develop a system for searching the entire school population on a continuous basis for likely candidates for services using both informal and available formal, normed, standardized measures, including measures of nonverbal ability;
 - (b) Data analysis. A district shall develop a system for analyzing student data for the purposes of a comparison of the students under consideration for identification to local or national norms, including those required in this administrative regulation, and to district-established criteria of eligibility for each category of giftedness;
 - (c) Committee for determination of eligibility and services. A school district or school shall assemble a selection and placement committee which shall have four (4) purposes:
 1. To provide feedback on the adequacy of the district's identification and diagnostic procedure;
 2. To ensure that a variety of views are heard during the selection and placement process;
 3. To determine which students meet identification criteria and which services, at what level, shall be included in each identified student's gifted and talented student services plan; (note: a GSSP is not required for a primary student) and
 4. To help provide communication and support in the schools and community;
 - (d) Provision of services. A district shall implement articulated services from primary through grade twelve (12) which provide multiple delivery options matched to diagnosed behaviors, strengths and characteristics of individual students; and
 - (e) Petition and appeal for services. A district shall provide a petition system as a safeguard for a student who may have been missed in the identification and diagnosis procedure.
- (2) Exceptions and special considerations for eligibility. School personnel shall take into consideration environmental, cultural, and disabling conditions which may mask a child's true abilities that lead to exclusion of otherwise eligible students, such as a student who qualifies as:
 - (a) An exceptional child as defined in KRS 157.200;
 - (b) Disadvantaged; or
 - (c) Underachieving.

Section 6. Service Delivery Options. (1) A student diagnosed as possessing gifted characteristics, behaviors or talent shall be provided articulated, primary through grade twelve (12) services which:

- (a) Are qualitatively differentiated to meet his individual needs;
 - (b) Result in educational experiences commensurate with his interests, needs and abilities; and
 - (c) Facilitate the high level attainment of goals established in KRS 158.6451.
- (2) For a student in a primary program, services shall be provided within the framework of primary program requirements and shall allow for continuous progress through a differentiated curriculum and flexible grouping and regrouping based on the individual needs, interests, and abilities of the student.
- (3) Emphasis on educating gifted students in the general primary classroom, shall not preclude the continued, appropriate use of resource services, acceleration options, or the specialized service options contained in subsection (5) of this section. A recommendation for a service shall be made on an individual basis.
- (4) Grouping for instructional purposes and multiple services delivery options shall be utilized in a local district gifted education plan. Student grouping formats shall include grouping for instructional purposes based on student interests, abilities, and needs, including social and emotional.
- (5) There shall be multiple service delivery options with no single service option existing alone, district-wide, at a grade level. These service delivery options shall be differentiated to a degree as to be consistent with KRS 157.200(1). Both grouping for instructional purposes and multiple service delivery options may include:

- (a) Various acceleration options (e.g., early exit from primary, grade skipping, content and curriculum in one (1) or more subjects from a higher grade level);
 - (c) Collaborative teaching and consultation services;
 - (d) Special counseling services;
 - (e) Differentiated study experiences for individuals and cluster groups in the regular classroom;
 - (f) Distance learning;
 - (g) Enrichment services during the school day (not extracurricular);
 - (h) Independent study;
 - (i) Mentorships;
 - (j) Resource services delivered in a pull-out classroom or other appropriate instructional setting;
 - (k) Seminars;
 - (l) Travel study options; or
- (6) With the exception of an academic competition or optional extracurricular offering, services shall be provided during the regular school hours.

Primary Talent Pool Questions and Answers

Q: What is the Primary Talent Pool?

A: The Primary Talent Pool is a group of primary students (P1-P4; Kindergarten through Third Grade) informally selected as having characteristics and behaviors of a high potential learner and further diagnosed using a series of informal and formal measures to determine differentiated services during the primary program.

Q: What is the benefit of selecting students for the PTP?

A: The benefit of selecting students to participate in the PTP provides early enrichment for those students whose gifts and talents need to be nurtured in order for those talents to develop further. Additionally, talent development may assist in the formal identification process in fourth grade.

Q: When students become eligible for formal identification in the fourth grade, are PTP students automatically identified as GT?

A: PTP students are not automatically identified as GT once they reach the fourth grade. Specific and more stringent criteria must be met to formally identify a GT student.

Q: Can formal testing be used to select students for the PTP?

A: Yes. However, data from formal, normed measures shall not be used for the purpose of eliminating eligibility for services to a child in the primary program. Formal, normed measures may be used to discover and include eligible students overlooked by informal assessments.

Q: What percentage of primary students is recommended to be selected for the PTP?

A: According to 704 KAR 3:285, “high-potential learners” are students who typically represent the top quartile (25%) of the entire student population in terms of the degree of demonstrated gifted characteristics and behaviors. The PTP may represent the top 5% in each of the five areas of GT (general intellectual ability, specific academic aptitude, leadership, creativity and the visual and performing arts) for a total of 25% of the entire primary school population.

Q: Can a student be selected for the PTP one year and not the next?

A: No. Once a student is in the PTP, the student remains in the talent pool until exiting the third grade (P4). Services may need to be periodically adjusted to fit the individual child’s specific needs.

Q: Are parents/guardians to be notified that their child is in the PTP?

A: There is no reference in the gifted regulation that parents/guardians of PTP students are to be notified of student selection. Individual districts may decide whether to notify or not and this can be addressed in the district’s policies and procedures.

Q: How are services delivered to PTP?

A: For a student in the primary grades, services shall allow for continuous progress through a differentiated curriculum and flexible grouping and regrouping based on the individual needs, interests, and abilities of the student. Emphasis on educating gifted students in the general primary classroom, shall not exclude the continued, appropriate use of resource services, acceleration options, or other specific service options. A recommendation for a service shall be made on an individual basis.

PRIMARY TALENT POOL FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. What is Primary Talent Pool (PTP)?

The PTP allows for less formal groupings of students, or cluster groups of students, who possess demonstrated or potential ability to perform at exceptionally high levels in grades kindergarten through third (Primary – P1 through P4).

2. How are students selected for PTP participation?

Selection is performed by teachers and/or a school committee which may consist of school administration, teaching faculty, counselors and community or parent members. Through classroom observations of student behaviors and completed assignments, students can be recommend for placement in a PTP grouping for areas of interest, needs, or abilities. The selection committee shall consider environmental, cultural, and disabling conditions. The selection committee should follow the principle: When in doubt, err on the side of inclusion.

3. Why should 25% of primary students be involved in the PTP?

This number represents one-fourth of the entire school population. Inclusivity and informal identification of the primary students in a school should have students demonstrating exceptional characteristics in the areas of general intellectual ability, creative thinking and productivity, leadership skills, specific academic aptitude (language arts, math, science and social studies), and visual and performing arts.

4. What is meant by informal identification?

Students can be identified for participation in the PTP by using a minimum of three of the following indicators which may include portfolios or collection of evidence demonstrating student performance; teacher/behavior checklists; continuous progress data; anecdotal records; **available** formal test data; parent recommendation/inventory/interview or questionnaire; primary review committee recommendation in the local school, or other valid and reliable documentation.

5. Can any formal testing be done with PTP students?

Yes. Formal testing may be done to determine the level of instruction needed in a specific academic area.

6. How are students served in the PTP?

Students will receive instruction in identified areas of giftedness through assignments that are developmentally appropriate.

7. Do Primary Talent Pool students automatically qualify as gifted students once they exit the primary grades and move into 4th grade?

No. Parents of PTP students interested in participating in gifted and talented programs must proceed through a District's screening process, which includes formal testing, teacher evaluation, record of academic achievement, and any other pertinent testing.

8. Do Primary Talent Pool students have a Gifted Student Service Plan (GSSP)?

No, but the teacher providing services to PTP students should have a record of enrichment and/or differentiated services provided for each student.

9. Is it necessary to nominate students for Primary Talent Pool in the five (5) areas, or is being in the primary talent pool all inclusive of the areas?

Students participate in the primary talent pool based on teacher and/or parent observations or recommendations. Students may or may not receive services in all five areas. Students usually receive services in a specific area of identified interest, need or ability.

Primary Talent Pool

Adapted from Technical Assistance Manual for Gifted and Talented Education

Selection of students possessing demonstrated or potential gifted/talented ability shall be informal within the primary program. Those areas for which a student may be placed in the Primary Talent Pool (PTP) are general intellectual ability, specific academic aptitude, creative or divergent thinking, leadership skills, and visual/performing arts. Students should be placed in the PTP at any time during the primary years, as evidence which indicates exceptional talent or potential exceptional talent is collected.

While all children are to be taught creative thinking skills, leadership skills, visual and performing arts skills, and to achieve at high levels in the content areas, some children will learn at a faster pace and more complex level in one or more of these areas. The Administrative Regulation on Gifted Education 704 KAR 3.285 states that these children are to be recommended for services which are qualitatively differentiated to meet their individual needs in the specific area(s) in which they demonstrate exceptional talent or the potential for exceptional talent.

To place a student in the PTP, a minimum of 3 informal assessments in each area that a primary student exhibits demonstrated or potential ability must be presented. Some students selected for the PTP may display ability in more areas of giftedness or talent, while other primary students may display high potential in only one area of giftedness. All primary students with 3 or more informal measures indicating high ability in one or more areas of giftedness will receive services addressing those specific areas of gifts or talents that were informally identified. Students may be placed in the PTP as evidence is collected during the primary years which support the need for differentiated services. A primary review committee composed of primary teachers, counselors, administrators, gifted education personnel and any other appropriate personnel familiar with the child's potential or demonstrated ability should determine eligibility for services.

It would be helpful to use the term "high potential" student when referring to students in the PTP rather than saying that the students are gifted. Students are not formally identified as gifted until the end of the primary program.

Informal measures may place several students in the PTP in the specific academic area of math. Once these high potential math students are placed in the PTP for that specific academic area, formal measures such as individual math achievement tests may be used to help determine the level of student achievement and the appropriate level of instruction. These measures should allow the student to demonstrate the level at which he can perform. These formal measures should not be limited by a grade level ceiling. Formal identification measures, however, may not be used to deny services or to eliminate a student from the PTP. The data from these formal measures may be used to help determine the type of service delivery option(s) most appropriate for meeting the individual needs of each math talent pool student. For example, one 6-year old child in the PTP for math may have a grade equivalent of 4.2 on an individual math achievement test, and a 7-year old may have a grade equivalent of 4.4. Based on all data collected, the service delivery options to meet these students' needs might be to cluster group them together for math, provide curriculum compacting, and accelerate them in the specific area of math.

After a student is placed in the PTP, determination must be made as to who is responsible for delivering the differentiated services. Some academic PTP students may need to be cluster groups for reading and/or math and served by a regular classroom teacher. Other PTP students such as those requiring services in leadership development may meet once a week with the GT specialist. Intellectually high potential PTP students might be in a cluster group in math and/or reading and also meet with the GT specialist. Some students may be flexed up to the next grade to receive services in a specific academic aptitude. All services need to be differentiated and matched to student needs. Seeing a GT specialist once a week would not be an appropriate service delivery option for a student requiring services in math. Math is a daily subject and services need to be delivered daily. A student placed in the PTP for visual art may be served by an art specialist who would cluster group the visual art students and serve them in a pull-out program which meets one hour each week.

It is important to remember that there should be multiple service delivery options at each grade level and that services should be matched to each student's needs, interests, and abilities.

Adapted from Technical Assistance Manual for Gifted and Talented Education

General Intellectual Ability

Section 1. Definitions (16) *General intellectual ability" means possessing: (a) Either the potential or demonstrated ability to perform at an exceptionally high level in general intellectual ability, which is usually reflected in extraordinary performance in a variety of cognitive areas, such as abstract reasoning, logical reasoning, social awareness, memory, nonverbal ability and the analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of information; and (b) A consistently outstanding mental capacity as compared to children of one's age, experience, or environment.*

At least 3 informal measures dealing specifically with general intellectual ability should be gathered to place students in the PTP where students receive services related to their general intellectual ability. When opportunities are provided which allow primary students to display abstract reasoning, logical reasoning, social awareness, memory, spatial relations, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of information, the data can be collected and used when considering placement for a student in the PTP in the area of general intellectual ability. The General Intellectual Jot Down (Appendix A) may be used during open-ended activities to record the names of students exhibiting the characteristics of general intellectual ability.

Data from a formal test which was administered to all primary students may be used to include students in the PTP. Also, after the talent pool has been established, all primary students might be given a non-verbal test of cognitive ability which could be used to include students who were missed in the informal process. The scores from this test may not be used to remove a child from the PTP. The use of the non-verbal test in this way serves as a safety net to ensure that typically underrepresented children have equal access to GT services. It is especially effective in discovering intellectually gifted children who are often overlooked—disadvantaged, ethnically/culturally diverse, underachieving, and children with disabilities.

Specific Academic Aptitude

Section 1. Definitions (30) *Specific academic aptitude means possessing either potential or demonstrated ability to perform at an exceptionally high level in one (1), or very few related, specific academic areas significantly beyond the age, experience or environment of one's chronological peers.*

At least 3 informal measures dealing with each specific academic area should be gathered to place students in the PTP so they may receive services related to specific academic area(s). When open-ended opportunities are provided which allow primary students to display exceptionally high levels of ability in a specific academic area, the data can be collected and used when considering placement for a student in the PTP for a specific academic area(s). The Academic Jot Down (Appendix A) may be used during the open-ended activities to record the names of students exhibiting characteristics in specific academic areas.

Data from a formal achievement test which was administered to all primary students may be used to include students in the PTP for specific academic aptitude. For example, all primary students were administered the MAP. Scores in specific academic areas (math, reading, etc.) may be used as one measure when looking for students in specific academic areas.

Creative or Divergent Thinking Ability

Section 1. Definitions (8) *"Creative or divergent thinking ability" means possessing either potential or demonstrated ability to perform at an exceptionally high level in creative thinking and divergent approaches to conventional tasks as evidenced by innovative or creative reasoning, advanced insight and imagination, and solving problems in unique ways.*

At least 3 informal measures dealing specifically with creative or divergent thinking characteristics should be gathered to place a student in the PTP for services in creative or divergent thinking. When informal open-ended opportunities are provided which allow primary students to display their creative or divergent thinking ability, the data can then be collected and used when considering placement for a student in the PTP in the area of creative/divergent thinking ability. The creative thinking activities and Creative Thinking Jot Down (Appendix A) may be used by all primary teachers as they observe students during open-ended activities and record the names of students exhibiting characteristic of creative or divergent thinking abilities.

Leadership Ability

Section 1. Definitions (26) *"Psychosocial or leadership ability" means possessing either potential or demonstrated ability to perform at an exceptionally high level in social skills and interpersonal qualities such as poise, effective oral and written expression, managerial ability, and the ability, or vision, to set goals and organize others to successfully reach those goals.*

At least 3 informal measures dealing specifically with leadership characteristics should be gathered to place a student in the PTP so she may receive services related to her leadership ability. Informal opportunities which allow students to display their natural leadership ability will provide a rich resource for collecting informal measures which can be used when considering placement for a student in the PTP in the area of Leadership Ability.

The Leadership Jot Down may be used by primary teachers as they observe students during open-ended activities such as the playground or prior to the start of class, to record the names of students exhibiting characteristics of leadership. Other educators such as art teachers, librarians, PE teachers, etc. may also find open-ended leadership opportunities and then fill out a Leadership Jot Down (Appendix A).

Visual and Performing Arts Ability

Section 1. Definitions (34) *"Visual or performing arts ability" means possessing either potential or demonstrated ability to perform at an exceptionally high level in the visual or performing arts and demonstrating the potential for outstanding aesthetic production, accomplishment, or creativity in visual art, dance, music, or drama.*

At least 3 informal measures related to each specific area of the visual and performing arts for which a student is being considered for the PTP should be gathered to place a student in the PTP so he may receive services related to specific visual or performing arts ability. When open-ended opportunities are provided which allow primary students to display exceptionally high levels of ability in an area of the visual or performing arts, the data can be collected and used when considering placement for a student in the PTP for a specific visual or performing arts area(s). The Art, Music, Dance, and Drama Jot Downs (Appendix A) may be used during open-ended activities to record the names of students exhibiting characteristics in the visual or performing arts.

Early Signs of Giftedness

Does your little one smile a lot? Is she extremely active and curious? You just might be raising the next Einstein! Find out from the experts whether your child is exhibiting early signs of giftedness.

Some early signs of giftedness include:

- Abstract reasoning and problem-solving skills
- Advanced progression through developmental milestones
- Curiosity
- Early and extensive language development
- Early recognition of caretakers (for example, smiling)
- Enjoyment and speed of learning
- Excellent sense of humor
- Extraordinary memory
- High activity level
- Intense reactions to noise, pain, or frustration
- Less need for sleep in infancy
- Long attention span
- Sensitivity and compassion
- Perfectionism
- Unusual alertness in infancy
- Vivid imagination (for example, imaginary companions)

The precursors of adult creativity are clearly evident in young children. This digest explores factors that affect creativity in children and techniques for fostering this quality. The need to study creativity, and the definition of creativity within a developmental framework, are also discussed.

WHY STUDY CREATIVITY IN YOUNG CHILDREN?

Just as all children are not equally intelligent, all children are not equally creative. But just as all children exhibit behaviors which evidence intelligence from birth, they also exhibit behaviors which evidence the potential for creativity.

Creativity is essentially a form of problem-solving. But it is a special type of problem-solving--one that involves problems for which there are no easy answers: that is, problems for which popular or conventional responses do not work. Creativity involves adaptability and flexibility of thought. These are the same types of skills that numerous reports on education (e.g., the Carnegie Report, 1986) have suggested are critical for students.

WHAT IS CREATIVITY?

Creativity has been considered in terms of process, product or person (Barron and Harrington, 1981) and has been defined as the interpersonal and intrapersonal process by means of which original, high quality, and genuinely significant products are developed. In dealing with young children, the focus should be on the process, i.e., developing and generating original ideas, which is seen as the basis of creative potential. When trying to understand this process, it is helpful to consider Guilford's (1956) differentiation between convergent and divergent thought. Problems associated with convergent thought often have one correct solution. But problems associated with divergent thought require the problem-solver to generate many solutions, a few of which will be novel, of high quality, and workable--hence creative.

For a proper understanding of children's creativity, one must distinguish creativity from intelligence and talent. Ward (1974) expressed concern about whether creativity in young children could be differentiated from other cognitive abilities. More recent studies (for example, Moran and others, 1983) have shown that components of creative potential can indeed be distinguished from intelligence. The term "gifted" is often used to imply high intelligence. But Wallach (1970) has argued that intelligence and creativity are independent of each other, and a highly creative child may or may not be highly intelligent.

Creativity goes beyond possession and use of artistic or musical talent. In this context, talent refers to the possession of a high degree of technical skill in a specialized area. Thus an artist may have wonderful technical skills, but may not succeed in evoking the emotional response that makes the viewer feel that a painting, for example, is unique. It is important to keep in mind that creativity is evidenced not only in music, art, or writing, but throughout the curriculum, in science, social studies and other areas.

Most measures of children's creativity have focused on ideational fluency. Ideational fluency tasks require children to generate as many responses as they can to a particular stimulus, as is done in brainstorming. Ideational fluency is generally considered to be a critical feature of the creative process. Children's responses may be either popular or original, with the latter considered evidence of creative potential. Thus when we ask four-year-olds to tell us "all the things they can think of that are red," we find that children not only list wagons, apples and cardinals, but also chicken pox and cold hands.

For young children, the focus of creativity should remain on process: the generation of ideas. Adult acceptance of multiple ideas in a non-evaluative atmosphere will help children generate more ideas or move to the next stage of self-evaluation. As children develop the ability for self-evaluation, issues of quality and the generation of products become more important. The emphasis at this age should be on self-evaluation, for these children are exploring their abilities to generate and evaluate hypotheses, and revise their ideas based on that evaluation. Evaluation by others and criteria for genuinely significant products should be used only with older adolescents or adults.

WHAT AFFECTS THE EXPRESSION OF CREATIVITY?

For young children, a non-evaluative atmosphere appears to be a critical factor in avoiding what Treffinger (1984) labels as the "right answer fixation." Through the socialization process, children move toward conformity during the elementary school years. The percentage of original responses in ideational fluency tasks drops from about 50% among four-year-olds to 25% during elementary school, then returns to 50% among college students (Moran et al., 1983). It is important that children be given the opportunity to express divergent thought and to find more than one route to the solution.

Rewards or incentives for children appear to interfere with the creative process. Although rewards may not affect the number of responses on ideational fluency tasks, they seem to reduce the quality of children's responses and the flexibility of their thought. In other words, rewards reduce children's ability to shift from category to category in their responses (Groves, Sawyers, and Moran, 1987). Indeed, any external constraint seems to reduce this flexibility. Other studies have shown that structured materials, especially when combined with structured instructions, reduce flexibility in four-year-old children (Moran, Sawyers, and Moore, in press). In one case, structured instructions consisted only in the demonstration of how to put together a model. Teachers need to remember that the structure of children's responses is very subtle. Research suggests that children who appear to be creative are often involved in imaginative play, and are motivated by internal factors rather than external factors, such as rewards and incentives

HOW CAN ADULTS ENCOURAGE CREATIVITY?

- * Provide an environment that allows the child to explore and play without undue restraints.
- * Adapt to children's ideas rather than trying to structure the child's ideas to fit the adult's.
- * Accept unusual ideas from children by suspending judgement of children's divergent problem-solving.
- * Use creative problem-solving in all parts of the curriculum. Use the problems that naturally occur in everyday life.
- * Allow time for the child to explore all possibilities, moving from popular to more original ideas.
- * Emphasize process rather than product.

CONCLUSION

Adults can encourage creativity by emphasizing the generation and expression of ideas in a non-evaluative framework and by concentrating on both divergent and convergent thinking. Adults can also try to ensure that children have the opportunity and confidence to take risks, challenge assumptions, and see things in a new way.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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EARLY CHILDHOOD

NAGC Position Paper

Creating Contexts for Individualized Learning in Early Childhood Education

This position statement, initiated by the Early Childhood Division of NAGC, focuses on creating optimal environments for recognizing, developing, and nurturing the strengths and talents of young gifted children, age 3 through 8. Characteristics of these young gifted children can include (but are not limited to): the use of advanced vocabulary and/or the development of early reading skills, keen observation and curiosity, an unusual retention of information, periods of intense concentration, an early demonstration of talent in the arts, task commitment beyond same-age peers, and an ability to understand complex concepts, perceive relationships, and think abstractly (Clark, 2002; Smutny, 1998; Smutny & von Fremd, 2004). Although many individuals are influential in the lives of young children, this position statement targets those who care for and are responsible for teaching young gifted children, including parents, caregivers, teachers, administrators, and other members of the community.

Early childhood gifted education focuses on recognizing, developing, and nurturing the strengths and talents of all children age 3 through 8. Early childhood educators and family members have mutual goals to develop children's capacity and passion for learning to the fullest potential. In addition, research indicates that an interactive and responsive environment in early childhood supports both cognitive and affective growth and establishes a pattern of successful learning that can continue throughout children's lives (Clark, 2002; Smutny, 1998). As such, the creation of rich and engaging learning environments in schools, homes, and communities during early childhood can enhance educational opportunities for learners and help put children on the path to academic achievement.

In many children, a pattern of gifted behaviors and/or advanced performance can be seen as early as preschool; however, classroom modifications for gifted students altering the pace, depth, or complexity of instruction are rarely implemented in pre-school and early-elementary classrooms (Robinson et al., 2002; Stainthorp & Hughes, 2004). Thus the early educational experiences of many young gifted children provide limited challenge and hinder their cognitive growth rather than exposing learners to an expansive, engaging learning environment. This problem may be intensified among traditionally underserved populations of young gifted students including culturally, linguistically, and ethnically diverse learners, as well as children from poverty because in many cases additional resources for providing enriched learning experiences in homes and communities are also limited (Robinson et al.; Scott & Delgado, 2005). Therefore, NAGC believes that providing engaging, responsive learning environments in which young learners' interests, strengths, and skills are identified, developed, and used to guide individualized learning experiences benefit all children, including young gifted children. Further, NAGC believes that providing a broad range of educational, health, and social services is especially critical for enabling young children from economically impoverished environments to develop and demonstrate high potential.

Young gifted learners are a heterogeneous group that is not easily defined or assessed. They present educators and families with unique challenges due to their rapid and often asynchronous development (Elkind, 1998). Varied and uneven physical, social, emotional, and cognitive growth can make identification of young learners' strengths, skills, and interests, and the subsequent provision of individualized instruction, difficult for those without formal training in acceleration and differentiation of curriculum and instruction (Gross, 1999; Smutny & von Fremd, 2004). In fact, research indicates that highly gifted young children frequently hide their advanced abilities or outstanding behaviors in educational settings to fit in socially with their peers (Gross). In addition, parents offer a unique perspective and are often among the first to recognize gifted behaviors in early childhood indicating that families must be included as active partners in the identification process and subsequent planning of learning environments (Barbour & Shaklee, 1998; Gross; Smutny, 1998). Ultimately, educators and families must work together to consistently develop and adapt environments that cultivate and respond to the learning needs of young gifted learners (Smutny & von Fremd).

Early childhood educators and family members play powerful and critical roles in establishing and supporting learning environments at home, in community settings, and in traditional school settings (Feinburg & Mindess, 1994; Smutny, 1998). These contexts vary and require the active participation of caring adults to recognize and nurture children's strengths, interests, and abilities. However, similar core elements must be in place across all contexts to establish an appropriate and responsive educational learning environment (Bredenkamp & Rosegrant, 1995; Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1993; Katz & Chard, 2000; Feinburg & Mindess; Smutny). The attributes of these core elements include:

- recognition of students as individuals who enter school with a unique set of experiences, interests, strengths, and weaknesses that will influence their readiness to learn (Elkind, 1998; Feinburg & Mindess; Smutny & von Fremd, 2004)
- informal and formal observations about student strengths and readiness that inform the planning of learning opportunities (Smutny; Smutny & von Fremd)
- flexibility in the pace at which learning opportunities are provided (Some gifted learners benefit from acceleration to prevent needless repetition while others make gains with additional time to explore a topic in a more in-depth manner than same-age peers.) (Smutny & von Fremd)
- challenging and content-rich curriculum that promotes both critical and creative thinking
- across all academic disciplines including reading, math, science, and the arts (Robinson et al., 2002; Smutny & von Fremd)
- opportunities to build advanced literacy skills (Gross, 1999; Stainthorp & Hughes, 2004)
- ample and varied materials including but not limited to technology, print material, and manipulative resources (Barbour & Shaklee, 1998; Bredenkamp & Rosegrant; Clark, 2002)
- instructional strategies that foster an authentic construction of knowledge based on exploration, manipulative resources, and experiential inquiry (Barbour & Shaklee; Clark; Katz & Chard),
- early exposure to advanced concepts in age-appropriate ways (Clark; Smutny)
- learning opportunities that provide choice and the development of independent problem solving (Robinson et al.)
- the identification and use of individual student interests to encourage investigative behaviors (Barbour & Shaklee; Smutny & von Fremd)
- interaction and collaboration with diverse peer groups of children having like and different interests and abilities (Bredenkamp & Rosegrant; Elkind)
- experiences that range from concrete to abstract (Katz & Chard; Smutny & von Fremd)
- opportunities for social interaction with same-age peers as well as individuals with similar cognitive abilities and interests (Bredenkamp & Rosegrant; Clark)
- engagement in a variety of stimulating learning experiences (including hands-on opportunities, imaginative play, and problem-solving) (Barbour & Shaklee; Clark; Smutny), and
- caring and nurturing child-centered environments that support healthy risk-taking behaviors (Barbour & Shaklee; Clark; Elkind; Smutny).

To actualize these optimal learning environments, NAGC supports the development of information for parents, educators, and caregivers on the traits, behaviors, and unique learning needs of young gifted children. We also promote collaboration with early childhood educators to increase their capacity to identify and nurture the interests, talents, and abilities of young gifted learners and to create intellectually engaging learning environments to provide the highest quality education possible for all young children.

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Gifted and Talented Students**Gifted and Talented Identification and Services: Marion County****Giftedness, as an educational entity:**

The federal law, Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act of 1988, provided a federal office in the U.S. Department of Education out of which came a national definition for giftedness, which most importantly states the Gifted and talented students are students who can be defined as “exceptional” – that is they can be identified as possessing demonstrated or potential ability to perform at an exceptionally high level in five general areas:

- General Intellectual
- Specific Academic Aptitude
- Creativity
- Leadership
- Visual/Performing Arts

Primary Talent Pool

- The Primary Talent Pool is an informal recognition of high potential students; not equivalent to formal gifted identification. This consists of approximately 25% of the student primary population.

IDENTIFICATION PROCEDURES

1. Counselors will administer the Raven Coloured Progressive Matrices to all exiting kindergarten and any new primary students during the second semester of the school year. This screening serves as a safety net for underachieving, underrepresented, and often overlooked students.
2. The counselors will provide a listing of students scoring in the 90+ percentile to the Gifted and Talented resource teacher.
3. The Gifted and Talented resource teacher will give primary teachers a listing of students scoring 90+.
4. Teachers will submit recommendations based on their observations for any high potential student.
5. Upon receiving the teacher recommendation, the Gifted and Talented teacher will seek other forms of evidence such as work samples and parent observation forms.

SERVICE DELIVERY

1. The majority of the primary talent pool students’ services should be through the regular classroom teacher providing continual progress by cluster grouping, differentiation, accelerating, and cross teaming.
2. The Gifted and Talented teacher will serve as material and professional development resource to teachers.

Nurturing Giftedness in Young Children

Versions of the following conversation can often be heard when young gifted children start school. "Bill doesn't belong in kindergarten!" the parent cries. "Look, he's reading at the fourth-grade level and has already learned two-column addition." The teacher or principal, having already decided this is a 'pushy parent,' replies, "Well, Mrs. Smith, Bill certainly doesn't belong in first grade; he hasn't learned to tie his shoelaces, and he can't hold a pencil properly, and he had a tantrum yesterday in the hall."

The problem in this continuing controversy is that both parties are usually correct. Some gifted children entering kindergarten have acquired academic skills far beyond those of their age mates. Such children master the academic content of kindergarten when they are 3 years old. However, their physical and social development may be similar to that of other 5-year-olds, making an accelerated placement a mismatch as well. The usual solution is to place a child like Bill in a program matched to his weaknesses, rather than to his strengths. Bill usually ends up in kindergarten, where his advanced intellectual development becomes a frustration to his teacher, an embarrassment to his peers, and a burden to Bill.

Educators justify this placement by saying, "Bill needs socialization; he's already so far ahead academically, he doesn't need anything in that area." There are two major problems with this rationale. First, educators are essentially telling such students that there is no need for them to learn anything in school. The second problem is revealed by examining the so called "socialization" experienced by a brilliant 5-year-old like Bill in a kindergarten class of 25 to 30 students. A major component of early socialization involves a child's feeling that she or he is accepted by others-- teachers and children alike. If the teacher does not validate a gifted child's advanced abilities and intellectual interests by making them part of the ongoing curriculum, the child experiences no feelings of acceptance from the teacher. If, as is highly likely, this child makes the additional discovery that she or he is quite different from most classmates and that communication is extremely difficult because of differences in vocabulary and modes of expression, then the child misses peer acceptance as well. In fact, this first school experience, which should furnish the impetus for future enthusiasm about learning, can be a dismal failure for the brilliant child in a lockstep kindergarten program. Often these children learn to hide or deny their abilities, so as to fit in better with the other children. Or, they may develop behavioral problems or psychosomatic symptoms such as stomachaches and headaches, causing parents to confront the school with justifiable concern.

Understanding Uneven Development

It is important to remember that these children very often do not develop evenly. In fact, young gifted children frequently show peaks of extraordinary performance rather than equally high skill levels in all cognitive areas. The child who learns to read at age 3 or who shows unusually advanced spatial reasoning ability, for example, may not be the child with the highest IQ or the earliest language development. Unique patterns of development can be observed within a group of gifted children, and uneven development is frequently evident in the pattern of a single child. In some cases, it seems as though children's abilities develop in spurts, guided by changes in interest and opportunity. Reading ability, for example, might develop almost overnight. Children who know all their letters and letter sounds by age 2-1/2 may remain at that level for some time, perhaps until age 4 or 5, and then in a matter of months develop fluent reading skills at the third or fourth grade level.

Another area of unevenness in the development of gifted young children is found in the relationship between

advanced intellectual development and development of physical and social skills. Evidence seems to indicate that intellectually gifted children's performance in the physical domain may only be advanced to the extent that the physical tasks involve cognitive organization. And, although intellectually advanced children tend to possess some advanced social-cognitive skills, they do not necessarily demonstrate those skills in their social behavior. In other words, they may understand how to solve social conflicts and interact cooperatively, but not know how to translate their understanding into concrete behavior.

It is not uncommon to find gifted young children experiencing a vast gap between their advanced intellectual skills and their less advanced physical and emotional competencies. For example, 4- and 5-year old children may converse intelligently about abstract concepts such as time and death and read fluently at the fourth-grade level, yet find it difficult to hold a pencil or to share their toys with others.

Often these uneven developmental levels can lead to extreme frustration, as children find that their limited physical skills are not sufficiently developed to carry out the complex projects they imagined. These children may throw tantrums or even give up on projects without trying. Adult guidance in developing coping strategies can help such children set more realistic goals for themselves and learn how to solve problems effectively when their original efforts do not meet their high expectations.

Adults, too, can be misled by children's advanced verbal ability or reasoning skill into expecting equally advanced behavior in all other areas. It is unsettling to hold a high-level conversation with a 5 year-old who then turns around and punches a classmate who stole her pencil. Sometimes young children's age-appropriate social behavior is interpreted as willful or lazy by parents and teachers whose expectations are unrealistically high. The only accurate generalization that can be made about the characteristics of intellectually gifted young children is that they demonstrate their unusual intellectual skills in a wide variety of ways and that they form an extremely heterogeneous group with respect to interests, skill levels in particular areas, social development, and physical abilities.

Understanding the unique developmental patterns often present in gifted children can help parents, and teachers as well, adjust their expectations of academic performance in young children to a more reasonable level.

Choosing a Program or School

One of the few psychological truths educators and psychologists agree upon states that the most learning occurs when an optimal match between the learner's current understanding and the challenge of new learning material has been carefully engineered. Choosing a program or school for a gifted child who masters ideas and concepts quickly but who behaves like a typical 4- or 5-year-old is indeed a challenge.

Many intellectually gifted children master the cognitive content of most preschool and kindergarten programs quite early. They come to school ready and eager to learn concepts not usually taught until an older age. However, academic tasks designed for older children often require the learner to carry out teacher-directed activities while sitting still and concentrating on written work sheets. Young children, no matter how bright they are, require active involvement with learning materials and often do not have the writing skills required for above-grade-level work.

Since many gifted children will hide their abilities so as to fit in more closely with classmates in a regular program, teachers may not be able to observe advanced intellectual or academic abilities directly. If a kindergartner enters school with fluent reading ability, the parent should share this information at the beginning of the year instead of waiting until the end of the year to complain that the teacher did not find out that the child could read. When parents and teachers pool their observations of a child's skills, they begin to work together to develop appropriate educational options for nurturing those abilities. Parents whose children have some unusual characteristics that will

affect their learning needs have an obligation to share that information with educators, just as educators have an obligation to listen carefully to parent concerns.

When the entry level of learners is generally high but extremely diverse, an appropriate program must be highly individualized. Children should be encouraged to progress at their own learning rate, which will result in most cases in subject matter acceleration. The program should be broadly based, with planned opportunities for development of social, physical, and cognitive skills in the informal atmosphere of an early childhood classroom.

One primary task of teachers is to make appropriately advanced content accessible to young children, taking into account individual social and physical skills. Lessons can be broken into short units, activities presented as games, and many concepts taught through inquiry-oriented dialogue and experimentation with manipulatable materials. Language experience activities in reading and the use of manipulatable math materials as described in products like *Mathematics Their Way* (Baratta-Lorton, 1976) are good examples of appropriate curriculum approaches.

An appropriate learning environment should also offer a gifted young child the opportunity to discover true peers at an early age. Parents of gifted children frequently find that, while their child can get along with other children in the neighborhood, an intense friendship is likely to develop with a more developmentally equal peer met in a special class or interest-based activity. Such parents may be dismayed to discover that this "best friend" does not live next door but across town, and may wonder whether or not to give in to their child's pleas for inconvenient visits. Probably one of the most supportive activities a parent can engage in is to help a child find a true friend and make the effort required to permit the friendship to flower.

In looking for an appropriate program for their gifted preschooler, then, parents must be aware of the learning needs of young children and not be misled by so-called experts who advocate rigid academic approaches with an emphasis on rote memorization and repetition. Rather, wise parents will look for open-endedness, flexible grouping, and opportunities for advanced activities in a program that allows their child to learn in the company of intellectual peers.

Resources

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- Roedell, W. C., Jackson, N. E., & Robinson, H. B. (1980). *Gifted young children*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Spivack, G., & Shure, M. B. (1974). *Social adjustment of young children*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Additional Reading

- Smutny, J. F., Veenker, K., Veenker, S. (1989). *Your gifted child: How to recognize and develop the special talents in your child from birth to age seven. A practical source book containing a wealth of information for parents and educators of young gifted children. Leads parents through infancy and early childhood, discussing topics such as language development, creativity, and how to choose schools. Provides a developmental checklist.* New York, NY: Facts On File. Also available from The Council for Exceptional Children/ The ERIC Clearinghouse on Disabilities and Gifted Education.

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