



Responding to the Needs of Elementary Level Gifted Learners







*A Position Statement of the
Minnesota Educators of the Gifted and Talented (MEGT)
www.mnegt.org*

Purpose

Elementary gifted learners are found within all cultures, as well as all socioeconomic, racial, linguistic, and ethnic groups. Schools must nurture and support the emerging and demonstrated talents of these unique learners. Gifted learners need a continuum of services throughout their K-12 experience. The purpose of this position paper is to acknowledge the specialized academic and affective needs of elementary gifted students and to advocate for their right to differentiated daily instruction and comprehensive services. Our goal is to provide a rationale for a continuum of intentional and consistent gifted programming.

Concerns

From kindergarten through grade 5, the gifted learner enters the classroom with advanced knowledge and an ability to learn at a more rapid rate and depth than age peers, but may be the student least challenged by the regular grade level curriculum. Gifted elementary grade students differ from their age mates in three significant areas: 1) rate of learning, 2) depth of understanding, and 3) interests. In many school districts a lack of mandates, minimal funding, time spent on testing, and unsupportive leadership leads to ineffective programming. The main areas of concern regarding the education of elementary gifted students are

-  the difficulty teachers have tailoring learning to individual needs given the wide range (3 - 5 years or more) of academic readiness and ability.
-  the insufficient use of appropriate grouping practices for instruction leading to “one size fits all” education.
-  the significant differentiation of instruction needed to enhance advanced learning not taking place.
-  districts not utilizing appropriately challenging curriculum which would maximize gifted students’ potential.
-  professional development activities not designed to enable teachers to recognize the needs of their gifted students.
-  the educational community not accepting that they share responsibility for the education of gifted students.



Recommendations

Elementary gifted learners have the right to an appropriately challenging curriculum. Curriculum should include interdisciplinary themes, complex ideas, and abstract concepts.

Gifted students have distinctive needs. For teachers to deliver effective instruction, they need training in gifted education, monetary funding, and administrative support.

Teachers need to employ appropriate flexible grouping strategies to allow for more rapid and advanced instruction that matches the developing skills and capabilities of gifted students.

Schools should use a multiple programming approach; one where a variety of programs are available in which students can participate based on their abilities, needs and interests. Some of these options are total school clustering model, mentorships, compacting, grouping, flexible pacing, enrichment clusters, and send-out classes.

Gifted learners require purposeful differentiated instruction throughout the school day, as they spend the majority of their day in a regular classroom. Schools should provide opportunities for pre-testing, compacting, acceleration, higher-level questioning and complex curriculum.

Meeting the needs of gifted students is a shared responsibility, whatever the educational setting. The classroom teacher and gifted specialist should work cooperatively in planning strategies and instruction to meet the needs of gifted students.

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