



2025 Talented and Gifted Education Programming Plan

ECASD Vision

We challenge minds, build relationships, and nurture individual growth to prepare all students for post-secondary success.

Update 2020

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Overview

In the Eau Claire Area School District, implementing a framework of equitable multi-level system of supports (EMLSS) means providing equitable services, practices, and resources to every learner based upon responsiveness to effective instruction and intervention. In this system, high quality instruction, strategic use of data, and collaboration interact within a continuum of supports to facilitate learner success. Schools provide varying types of supports at differing levels of intensity to adjust proactively and responsively to the needs of the whole child. These include the knowledge, skills, and habits learners need for success beyond high school, including developmental, academic, behavioral, social and emotional skills. The EMLSS framework includes structures to support talented and gifted students. The Talented and Gifted Program is comprehensive, continuous, and challenging. Additionally, programming and services are inclusive, culturally relevant, and responsive to ensure post-secondary success.

The ECASD 2022 Talented and Gifted Programming Plan is organized using the 2019 National Association of Gifted Children PreK-Grade 12 Gifted Programming Standards as well as our EMLSS framework. The student outcomes and evidence-based practices in the programming standards serve as criteria on which to collect data to make informed judgments about the quality and effectiveness of our programming for learners with gifts and talents. They allow us to establish benchmarks as well as set goals and timelines to ensure we are on track to achieving desired student outcomes.

Programming Standard 1: Learning and Development

Programming Standard 2: Assessment

Programming Standard 3: Curriculum Planning and Instruction

Programming Standard 4: Learning Environments

Programming Standard 5: Programming

Programming Standard 6: Professional Learning

Programming Goals

ECASD 2025 Talented and Gifted Programming Plan Goals

In the Eau Claire Area School District implementing a framework of equitable multi-level system of supports (EMLSS) means providing equitable services, practices, and

1. Create access for underrepresented students to gifted and advanced programs and appropriately challenging coursework.
2. Increase the integrity of talented and gifted programs to ensure academic and social/emotional needs of all students are met.
3. Create systems to increase learning and clear communication with all stakeholders.

Areas of Focus for 2020-2021 School Year (Covid-19)

Standard 2 – Assessment: Clearly articulate identification procedures and communication of all steps. Define metrics for success and articulate roles and responsibilities, including professional learning for teachers and principals, to implement the Talented and Gifted Programming Plan.

Standard 5— Programming: Evaluate current program and practices, identify gaps, and update plan to better reach the above three goals.

Legislation

Preface

Standard(t) of the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction requires that each school district develop a means for identifying students as gifted and talented in any of the following general intellectual, specific academic, leadership, creativity, and visual and performing arts. These students must be provided access to a set of systematic and continuous instructional activities that are appropriate to their developmental needs.

Wisconsin Legislation: Statutes and Rules for Gifted Education

Wisconsin Statute 118.35, Programs for gifted and talented pupils.

(1) In this section, "gifted and talented pupils" means pupils enrolled in public schools who give evidence of high performance capability in intellectual, creative, artistic, leadership or specific academic areas and who need services or activities not ordinarily provided in a regular school program in order to fully develop such capabilities.

(2) The state superintendent shall by rule establish guidelines for the identification of gifted and talented pupils.

(3) Each school board shall ensure that all gifted and talented pupils enrolled in the school district have access to a program for gifted and talented pupils.

(4) From the appropriation under s. 20.255 (2) (fy), the department shall award grants to nonprofit organizations, cooperative educational service agencies, institutions within the University of Wisconsin System, and school districts for the purpose of providing to gifted and talented pupils those services and activities not ordinarily provided in a regular school program that allow such pupils to fully develop their capabilities.

Administrative Rule 8.01(2)(t)2. Each school district board shall establish a plan and designate a person to coordinate the gifted and talented program. Gifted and talented pupils shall be identified as required in s. 118.35 (1), Stats. This identification shall occur in kindergarten through grade 12 in general intellectual, specific academic, leadership, creativity, and visual and performing arts. A pupil may be identified as gifted or talented in one or more of the categories under s. 118.35 (1), Stats. The identification process shall result in a pupil profile based on multiple measures, including but not limited to standardized test data, nominations, rating scales or inventories, products, portfolios, and demonstrated performance. Identification tools shall be appropriate for the specific purpose for which they are being employed. The identification process and tools shall be responsive to factors such as, but not limited to, pupils' economic conditions, race, gender, culture, native language, developmental differences, and identified disabilities as described under subch. V of ch. 115, Stats. The school district board shall provide access, without charge for tuition, to appropriate programming for pupils identified as gifted or talented as required under ss.

118.35 (3) and 121.02 (1) (t), Stats. The school district board shall provide an opportunity for parental participation in the identification and resultant programming.

Wisconsin Statute 121.02(1)(t), relating to school board requirements.

Provide access to an appropriate program for pupils identified as gifted or talented.

Definitions of Terms

“Access” means an opportunity to study through school district course offerings, independent study, cooperative educational service agencies, or cooperative arrangements between school district boards under s. 66.0301, Stats., and postsecondary education institutions (per PI 8.001(1), Wis. Admin. Rule).

“Appropriate program” means a systematic and continuous set of instructional activities or learning experiences which expand the development of the pupils identified as gifted or talented (per PI 8.01(2)(t)1.a., Wis. Admin. Rule).

ECASD Policies & Rules

ECASD Board Policy for Gifted Education

The Eau Claire Area School District strives to offer each student learning experiences appropriate to his/her individual educational needs, interest and capabilities. The ECASD shall provide a continuum of services to high achieving students including, but not limited to, those identified as gifted and talented based on the guidelines set forth in the Wisconsin Guidelines for Gifted and Talented and shall include students who demonstrate high performance capability in intellectual, creative, artistic, leadership or specific academic areas.

Referenced Acts, Statutes, Instructions: §118.35, §121.02 (1) (t), Pl 8.01(2) (t) Cross Reference:
Adopted: June 2011 Revised:

Early Admission/Early Acceleration

Request for Early Admission/Early Acceleration – Exhibit

Elementary Grade Advancement Guidelines

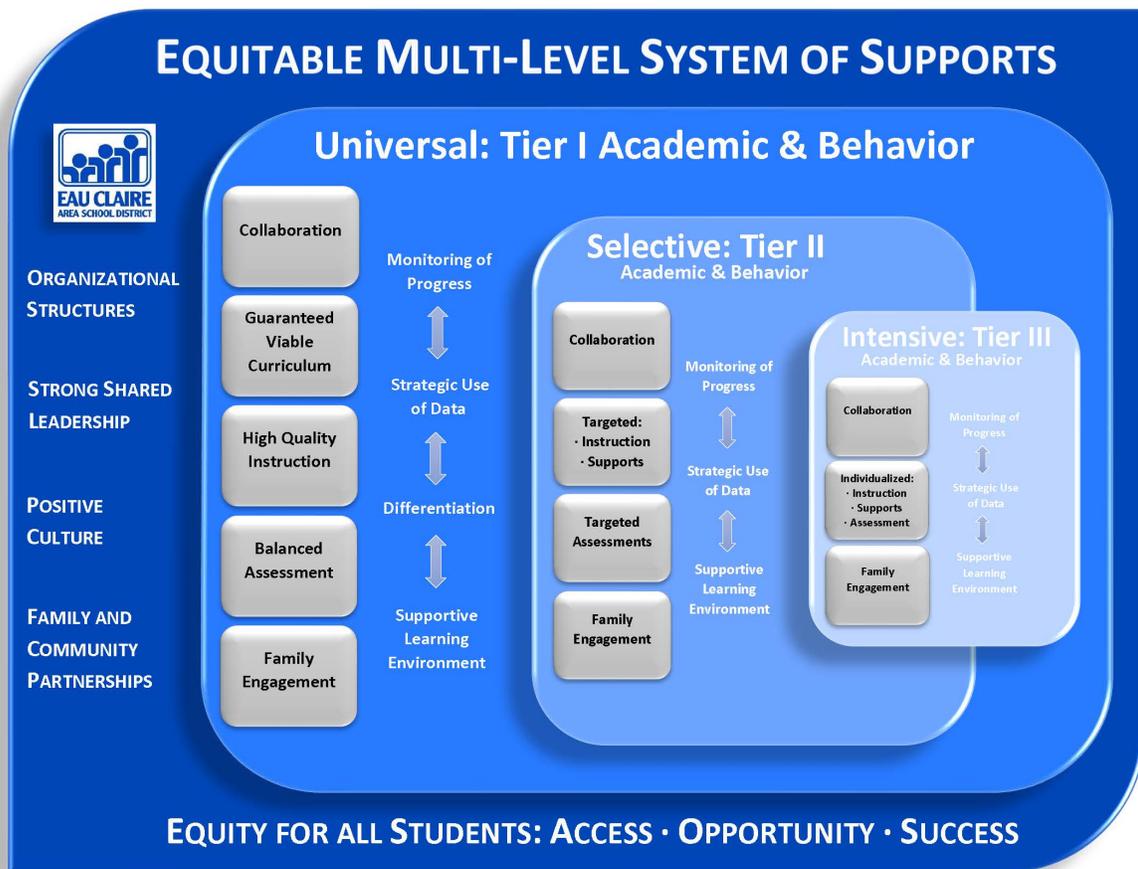
Elementary/Middle School Grade Advancement Guidelines

Acceleration Guidelines 354.4 Rule 1

<insert links to above documents>

EMLSS Framework

Our EMLSS (Equitable Multi-level System of Support) framework focuses on meeting student needs academically and socially/emotionally at the appropriate time with the appropriate interventions and extensions. The identification process focuses on determining student need rather than labeling students. This approach recognizes that students develop at different rates. They enter school with different early experiences, with different strengths, from different cultures, and with varying levels developmental background. Our schools must provide all students with a rich, invigorating environment, engaging, complex material, and high-quality instruction.



Programming Standard 1: Learning & Development

Introduction

Educators must understand the learning and developmental differences of students with gifts and talents in order to provide curriculum, instruction, assessment, and programming that will develop students' talents and abilities fully and help them become aware, self-directed learners. Learning and developmental differences provide the rationale for differentiated and specialized programming and services. While educators need to understand the cognitive development of students with gifts and talents, they also need to know about psychological and social and emotional needs that need to be addressed that support talent development in the contexts of school, home, and the larger community.

Student Outcomes

- Students with gifts and talents recognize their interests, strengths, and needs in cognitive, creative, social, emotional, and psychological areas.
- Students with gifts and talents demonstrate understanding of how they learn and recognize the influences of their identities, cultures, beliefs, traditions, and values on their learning and behavior.
- Students with gifts and talents demonstrate understanding of and respect for similarities and differences between themselves and their cognitive and chronological peer groups and others in the general population.
- Students identify and access supplemental, outside-of-school resources that support the development of their gifts and talents (e.g., families, mentors, experts, or programs)
- Students with gifts and talents demonstrate cognitive growth and psychosocial skills that support their talent development as a result of meaningful and challenging learning activities that address their unique characteristics and needs..
- Students with gifts and talents identify future career goals that match their interests and strengths. Students determine resources needed to meet those goals (e.g., supplemental educational opportunities, mentors, financial support).

Resource Links

[Programming Standard 1: Learning and Development](#)

ECASD Evidence-Based Practices: Standard 1 (in review and revision)

Actions Steps (in review and revision)

- Increasing Access
- Improving Programming
- Learning and Communicating with All Stakeholders

Programming Standard 2: Assessment

Introduction

Knowledge about different uses of assessment is essential for educators of students with gifts and talents. It is important to understand assessments when assessing abilities and achievement, designing services and identifying students in need of services, and assessing each student's learning progress. In order for assessment to yield useful information, the definition or operationalization of giftedness must align with the identification procedures, tools, and programming to be provided. Educators need to create a classroom environment that encourages students to express their gifts and talents and collect multiple types of assessment information so that all students have equal access to the identification process. Educators' understanding of technically adequate and equitable approaches that minimize bias will enable them to select and use the assessment tools needed to identify students who represent diverse backgrounds. They also need to differentiate their curriculum and instruction by using data from pre- and post-, performance-based, product-based, and other assessments that measure student growth. As a result of each educator's use of ongoing assessments, students with gifts and talents are aware of their learning progress and demonstrate growth commensurate with their abilities.

Student Outcomes

- All students in Pre-K through grade 12 with gifts and talents have equal access to the identification process and proportionally represent each campus.
- Students with gifts and talents are identified for services that match their interests, strengths, and needs.
- Students with identified gifts and talents represent diverse backgrounds.
- Students self-assess their learning progress.

Resource Links

[Programming Standard 2: Assessment](#)

ECASD Evidence-Based Practices: Standard 2 (in review and revision)

Actions Steps (in review and revision)

- Increasing Access
- Improving Programming
- Learning and Communicating with All Stakeholders

Programming Standard 3: Curriculum Planning & Instruction

Introduction

Educators need to develop and use a comprehensive and cohesive curriculum that is aligned with local, state, and national standards, then differentiate, accelerate, and/or expand it. Curriculum must emphasize advanced, conceptually challenging, in-depth, and complex content. Educators need to possess a repertoire of evidence-based instructional strategies in delivering the curriculum (a) to develop students' talents, enhance learning, and provide students with the knowledge and skills to become independent, self-aware learners, and (b) to give students the tools to contribute to a diverse and global society. The curriculum, instructional strategies, and materials and resources must engage a variety of gifted learners using practices that are responsive to diversity

Student Outcomes

- Students with gifts and talents demonstrate academic growth commensurate with their abilities each school year.
- Students with gifts and talents demonstrate growth in social and emotional and psychosocial skills necessary for achievement in their domain(s) of talent and/or areas of interest.
- Students with gifts and talents develop knowledge and skills for living in and contributing to a diverse and global society.
- . Students with gifts and talents demonstrate their potential or level of achievement in their domain(s) of talent and/or areas of interest.
- Students with gifts and talents become independent investigators.
- Students with gifts and talents are able to demonstrate growth commensurate with their abilities as a result of access to high-quality curricular resources.

Resource Links

[Programming Standard 3: Curriculum Planning & Instruction](#)

ECASD Evidence-Based Practices: Standard 3 (in review and revision)

Actions Steps (in review and revision)

- Increasing Access
- Improving Programming
- Learning and Communicating with All Stakeholders

Programming Standard 4: Learning Environments

Introduction

Effective educators of students with gifts and talents create safe learning environments that foster academic achievement, emotional well-being, positive social interaction, creativity, leadership development, and understanding for success in a diverse society. Knowledge of the impact of giftedness and diversity on cognitive, psychosocial, and social-emotional development enables educators of students with gifts and talents to design environments that encourage academic growth, personal and social competence, responsibility, and the development of leadership skills. They understand the role of language and communication in talent development and the ways in which culture and identity affect communication and behavior. They 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. They recognize the value of multilingualism in today's global community.

Student Outcomes

- Students with gifts and talents demonstrate growth in personal competence and dispositions for exceptional academic and creative productivity. These include self-awareness, self-advocacy, self-efficacy, confidence, motivation, resilience, independence, curiosity, and risk taking.
- Students with gifts and talents develop social competence manifested in positive peer relationships and social interactions.
- Students with gifts and talents demonstrate personal and social responsibility
- Students with gifts and talents value their own and others' language, heritage, and circumstance. They possess skills in communicating, teaming, and collaborating with diverse individuals and across diverse groups. They use positive strategies to address social issues, including discrimination and stereotyping.
- Students with gifts and talents develop competence in interpersonal and technical communication skills. They demonstrate advanced oral and written skills and creative expression. They display fluency with technologies that support effective communication and are competent consumers of media and technology

Resource Links

[Programming Standard 4: Learning Environments](#)

ECASD Evidence-Based Practices: Standard 4 (in review and revision)

Actions Steps (in review and revision)

- Increasing Access
- Improving Programming
- Learning and Communicating with All Stakeholders

Programming Standard 5: Programming

Introduction

The term programming refers to a continuum of services that address the interests, strengths, and needs of students with gifts and talents in all settings. Educators develop policies and procedures to guide and sustain all components of comprehensive and aligned programming and services for Pre-K through grade 12 students with gifts and talents. Educators use a variety of programming options such as acceleration and enrichment (depth and complexity) in varied grouping arrangements (cluster grouping, resource rooms, special classes, special schools) and within individualized learning options (independent study, original research, mentorships, online courses, internships) to enhance students' performance in cognitive, psychosocial, and social-emotional areas and to assist them in identifying future post-secondary and career goals and talent development pathways. They augment and integrate current technologies within these learning opportunities to increase access to high level programming such as online courses and to increase connections to resources outside of the school walls. In implementing services, educators in gifted, general, special education programs, and 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. Administrators demonstrate their support by allocating sufficient resources for programming options and evaluation activities so that all students with gifts and talents receive appropriate educational services.

Student Outcomes

- **Comprehensiveness.** Students with gifts and talents demonstrate growth commensurate with their abilities in cognitive, social-emotional, and psychosocial areas as a result of comprehensive programming and services.
- **Cohesive and Coordinated Services.** Students with gifts and talents demonstrate yearly progress commensurate with ability as a result of a continuum of Pre-K-12 services and coordination between gifted, general, special, and related professional services, including outside of school learning specialists and advocates.
- **Career Pathways.** Students with gifts and talents create future career-oriented goals and identify talent development pathways to reach those goals.
- **Collaboration.** Students with gifts and talents are able to continuously advance their talent development and achieve their learning goals through regular collaboration among families, community members, advocates, and the school.
- **Resources.** Students with gifts and talents participate in gifted education programming that is adequately staffed and funded to meet students' interests, strengths, needs.

- Policies and Procedures. Students with gifts and talents participate in general and gifted education programs guided by clear policies and procedures that provide for their advanced learning needs (e.g., early entrance, acceleration, credit in lieu of enrollment).
- Evaluation of Programming and Services. Students with gifts and talents demonstrate yearly learning progress commensurate with abilities as a result of high-quality programming and services matched to their interests, strengths, and needs.
- Evaluation of Programming and Services. Students with gifts and talents have access to programming and services required for the development of their gifts and talents as a result of ongoing evaluation and program improvements.

Resource Links

[Programming Standard 5: Programming](#)

ECASD Evidence-Based Practices: Standard 5 (in review and revision)

Actions Steps (in review and revision)

- Increasing Access
- Improving Programming
- Learning and Communicating with All Stakeholders

Programming Standard 6: Professional Learning

Introduction

Professional learning is essential for all educators (administrators, teachers, counselors, and other instructional support staff) involved in the development and implementation of gifted programs and services. Professional learning is the intentional, sustained development of professional expertise as outlined by the NAGC-CEC Teacher Preparation Standards in Gifted and Talented Education and (NAGC-CEC) Advanced Standards in Gifted Education Teacher Preparation and is an integral part of gifted educators' professional and ethical practice. Professional learning should be based on systematic needs assessments and professional reflection. Since students with gifts and talents spend much of their time within general education classrooms, general education teachers should receive instruction and coaching that enables them to recognize the characteristics of giftedness in diverse populations, understand the school or 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. Institutions of higher education should use these standards as a guide to address professional learning related to gifted education in their teacher preparation programs.

Student Outcomes

- **Talent 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.
- **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.
- **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.
- **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.
- **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.

Resource Links

[Programming Standard 6: Professional Learning](#)

ECASD Evidence-Based Practices: Standard 1 (in review and revision)

Actions Steps (in review and revision)

- Increasing Access
- Improving Programming
- Learning and Communicating with All Stakeholders

Glossary

Shared from the National Association for Gifted Children: Glossary of terms used in the 2019 NAGC PreK-Grade 12 Gifted Programming Standards & the Wisconsin DPI resource pages for Gifted Programming

<https://www.nagc.org/programming-standards-glossary-terms>

Acceleration. Acceleration encourages students to learn at a rate commensurate with their abilities. It is a strategy of progressing through education at rates faster or ages younger than the norm through grade-based or content-based acceleration. Grade-based acceleration includes options that reduce the number of years spent in school such as grade skipping, telescoping, and early admissions; whereas, content-based acceleration is domain specific and students receive grade-level instruction within their own class or in an advanced grade at an accelerated pace such as cross-grade grouping, single subject acceleration, and continuous progress. (Assouline, Colangelo, VanTassel-Baska, & Lupkowski-Shoplik, 2015; Colangelo, Assouline, & Gross, 2004; Rogers, 2007, 2015; Worrell, Subotnik, Olszewski-Kubilius, & Dixson, 2019).

Access means an opportunity to study through school district course offerings, independent study, cooperative educational service agencies, or cooperative arrangements between school district boards under s. 66.0301, Stats., and postsecondary education institutions (per PI 8.001(1), Wis. Admin. Rule).

Appropriate program means a systematic and continuous set of instructional activities or learning experiences which expand the development of the pupils identified as gifted or talented (per PI 8.01(2)(t)1.a., Wis. Admin. Rule).

Bias. A tendency or prejudice toward or against something or someone. Bias is frequently based stereotypes involving race, ethnicity, culture, language, age, (dis)abilities, family status/composition, gender identity and expression, sex, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, religious and spiritual values, geographic location, and country of origin. Bias related to gifted education can result in under identification of students and unequal access to gifted programming and services (Council for Exceptional Children, 2019; National Association for Gifted Children, n.d.; Plucker, 2018).

Cluster grouping. The intentional placement of a small group of students identified as gifted and talented or high achieving in a heterogeneous classroom with a teacher who has received professional learning in gifted education and will modify the pace, instruction, and curriculum for these students (Brulles & Winebrenner, 2011; Gentry, 1996, 2015, 2016).

Curriculum compacting. An instructional technique that involves three steps: assessing students' academic strengths, eliminating content that students have already mastered, and replacing the work that has been eliminated with more challenging and enriching alternatives, some of which are based on students' interests (Renzulli & Reis, 1998).

Differentiate instruction. When educators differentiate instruction they make “adaptations in content, process, product, affect and learning environment in response to student readiness, interests, and learning profile to ensure appropriate challenge and support for the full range of learners in a classroom” (Tomlinson, 2014, p. 198).

Equity – Educational equity means that every student has access to the resources and educational rigor they need at the right moment in their education, across race, gender, ethnicity, language, ability, sexual orientation, family background, and/or family income.

Growth Mindset – the belief that intelligence is fluid and develops over time. In contrast, a fixed mindset is the belief that intelligence is an inborn trait that does not change.

Instructional Framework – a common language and vision for quality teaching shared by everyone in a school district. An instructional framework provides a district-wide picture with levels of specificity to what is taught in all grades and in all subject areas, including the core content, grade level benchmarks, instructional strategies, and assessments. The framework provides curricular and instructional transitions between grades and disciplines within and among district schools.

Students with gifts and talents. This phrasing is currently preferred over “gifted and talented students” because it uses person first language and is consistent with usage in the field of special education. The focus is on the individual’s characteristics rather than the individual’s label. Individuals with gifts and talents includes ‘gifted and talented students,’ ‘high ability students,’ ‘academically advanced students,’ ‘gifted students with potential’ and so on.

Twice exceptional. Also referred to as “2e,” twice exceptional is the term used to describe students with gifts and talents who also give evidence of one or more disabilities as defined by federal or state eligibility criteria (e.g., specific learning disabilities (SpLD), speech and language disorders, emotional/behavioral disorders, physical disabilities, autism spectrum, etc.) (NAGC website)

References

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Websites & Resources

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[Best Practices in Gifted and Talented Education.](#) (Feb 2017). Hanover Research.

[Best Practices in Gifted and Talented Identification and Curriculum for Elementary Grades.](#) (April 2015). Hanover Research.

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[Gifted Programming for Middle School Students.](#) (Feb 2014). Prepared for Southeast Wisconsin Schools Alliance by Hanover Research

[Moving Wisconsin Student Forward: Advanced and Accelerated Learning in Wisconsin.](#) (2020). Wisconsin Association for Talented & Gifted.

Appendix

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CLUSTER GROUPING OF GIFTED STUDENTS

Frequently Asked Questions

By Susan Winebrenner

Adapted from: ERIC Digest EDO-EC-01-2

There is an alarming trend in many places to eliminate gifted education programs in the mistaken belief that all students are best served in heterogeneous learning environments. Educators have been bombarded with research that makes it appear that there is no benefit to ability grouping for any students. However, the work of many researchers (Allan, 1991; Feldhusen, 1989; Fiedler, Lange, & Winebrenner, 1993; Kulik and Kulik, 1990; Rogers, 1993) clearly documents the benefits of keeping gifted students together in their areas of greatest strength for at least part of the school day. Research also shows that *all* students, including average and below average students, benefit when gifted students are placed in their own cluster (Gentry, 1999; Brulles, 2005).

What Does Cluster Grouping Mean?

A group of identified gifted students are clustered in a mixed-ability classroom. The teacher has had training in how to teach exceptionally capable students. If there are more than six-eight gifted students, two or more clusters could be formed. High-average students are then placed into classrooms without the gifted clusters to balance out the classes in every grade.

Isn't Cluster Grouping The Same As Tracking?

No. In a tracking system, all students are grouped by ability, and students tend to remain in the same track throughout their school experience. In a tracking system, different curriculum is assigned to the different “tracks.” When cluster grouping, all classrooms focus on grade level standards, making extensions and acceleration available to students who have already mastered grade level standards. Gifted students benefit from learning together, and need to be placed with similar students in their areas of strength (Hoover, Saylor, & Feldhusen, 1993; Kulik & Kulik,

1990; Rogers, 1993). Cluster grouping of gifted students allows them to learn together, while avoiding permanent grouping arrangements for students of other ability levels.

Why Should Gifted Students Be Placed In A Cluster Group Instead Of Being Assigned Evenly To All Classes?

When teachers try to meet the diverse learning needs of all students, it becomes extremely difficult to provide adequately for everyone. Often, the highest ability students are expected to “make it on their own.” When a teacher has several gifted students, taking the time to make appropriate provisions for them seems more realistic. Furthermore, gifted students can better understand and accept their learning differences if there are others just like them in the class. Finally, scheduling out-of-class activities is easier when the resource teacher has only one cluster teacher’s schedule with which to work.

What Are The Learning Needs of Gifted Students?

Since these students have previously mastered many of the concepts they are expected to “learn” in a given class, a huge part of their school time may be wasted. They need exactly what all other students need: consistent opportunity to learn new material and to develop the behaviors that allow them to cope with the challenge and struggle of new learning. It is very difficult for such students to have those needs met in heterogeneous classes.

Isn't Gifted Education Elitist?

Gifted students need consistent opportunities to learn at their challenge level, just as all students do. It is inequitable to prevent gifted students from being challenged by trying to apply one level of difficulty for all students in mixed-ability classes. When teachers can provide opportunities for all students, including those who are gifted, to be challenged by rigorous curriculum, there is nothing elitist about the situation.

Don't We Need Gifted Students In All Classes So They Can Help Others Learn Through Cooperative Learning, Peer Tutoring And Other Collaborative Models?

When gifted students are placed in mixed-ability groups for cooperative learning, they frequently become tutors. Other students in these groups may rely on the gifted to do most of the work and may actually learn less than when the gifted students are not in their groups. Research indicates that a particular structure of cluster grouping raises everyone's achievement level (Gentry, 1999; Brulles, 2005). Cluster grouping creates a more narrow range of student achievement levels, allowing the teacher to focus instructional activities.

Won't The Creation Of A Cluster Group Rob The Other Classes Of Academic Leadership?

Research on role modeling (Schunk, 1987) indicates that to be effective, role models cannot be drastically discrepant in ability from those who would be motivated by them. When gifted students are grouped in a clustered classroom, they have the benefit of working with one another

and new leadership emerges in the other non-cluster classes. As classes are formed, be sure the classes without clusters of gifted students include several highly capable students. Teachers and administrators can expect measurable achievement gains across all classes.

How Does The Cluster Grouping Concept Fit In With The Inclusion Models That Integrate Students With Exceptional Educational Needs Into Regular Classes?

The inclusion model used in Special Education, in which students with exceptional learning needs are integrated into regular classrooms, is compatible with the concept of cluster grouping of gifted students, since both groups have exceptional educational needs. The practice of cluster grouping allows educators to come much closer to providing better educational services for groups of students with similar exceptional learning needs. In non-cluster classrooms, teachers report they are able to pay more attention to the special learning needs of those for whom learning may be more difficult. Some schools choose to avoid placing students with significant learning difficulties in the same class that has the cluster group of gifted students. A particular class may have a cluster of gifted students and a cluster of special education students as long as more than one adult is sharing the teaching responsibilities.

Won't The Presence Of The Clustered Gifted Students Inhibit The Performance Of The Other Students In That Class, Having A Negative Effect On Their Achievement?

When the cluster group is kept to a manageable size, many cluster teachers report that there is general improvement in achievement for the entire class. This suggests the exciting possibility that when teachers learn how to provide what gifted students need, they also learn to offer modified versions of the same opportunities to the entire class, thus raising the level of learning for all students, including those who are gifted. The positive effects of the cluster grouping practice may be shared with all students over several years by rotating the cluster teacher assignment among teachers who have had gifted education training and by rotating the other students so all students eventually have a chance to be in the same class with a cluster group.

What Specific Skills Are Needed By Cluster Teachers?

Since gifted students are as far removed from the “norm” as are students with significant learning difficulties, it is necessary for teachers to have special training in how to teach children of exceptionally high ability. Cluster teachers should know how to:

- recognize and nurture behaviors usually demonstrated by gifted students;
- create a learning environment in which all students will be stretched to learn;
- allow students to demonstrate and get credit for previous mastery of concepts;
- provide opportunities for faster pacing of new material;
- incorporate students' passionate interests into their independent studies;
- facilitate sophisticated research investigations;

- provide flexible grouping opportunities for the entire class.

What Are The Advantages Of Cluster Grouping?

Gifted students feel more comfortable when there are other students just like them in the class. They are more likely to choose more challenging tasks when other students will also be eligible. Teachers no longer have to deal with the strain of trying to meet the needs of just one precocious student in a class. Teachers are also much more likely to provide appropriate learning opportunities if more than one student will benefit. The school is able to provide a full-time, cost-effective program for gifted students, since their learning needs are being met every day. In the classes without the gifted clusters, high ability students find new opportunities to become class leaders. Teachers can more easily meet the needs of *all students* when the ability range in the classroom is narrowed.

What Are The Disadvantages Of Cluster Grouping?

There may be pressure from parents to have their children placed in a cluster classroom, even if they are not in the actual cluster group. Gifted students may move into the district during the school year and may not be able to be placed in the cluster classroom. These situations may be handled by:

- providing training for all staff in compacting and differentiation so parents can expect those opportunities in all classes
- rotating the cluster teacher assignment every 2-3 years among teachers who have had appropriate training so parents understand that many teachers are capable of teaching gifted students
- rotating other students into cluster classrooms over several years

Another disadvantage might arise if the cluster teachers are not expected to consistently compact and differentiate the curriculum. Their supervisor must expect them to maintain the integrity of the program, and must provide the needed support by facilitating regular meetings of cluster teachers and by providing time for the enrichment specialist to assist the cluster teachers.

Conclusion

If we do not allow cluster groups to be formed, gifted students may find their achievement and learning motivation waning in a relatively short period of time. Parents of gifted students may choose to enroll their children in alternative programs, such as home schooling or charter schools. The practice of cluster grouping represents a mindful way to make sure gifted students continue to receive a quality education at the same time schools work to improve learning opportunities for all students.

References

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