

Key Question Four:

How should schools identify the needs of gifted and talented students and provide for an appropriate range of services to meet those identified needs?

RECOMMENDATION 4.1.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Early childhood education programs should be structured, and teachers in these programs trained, so that talents are nurtured and exceptional abilities are recognized as early as possible.

RECOMMENDATION 4.2.

IDENTIFICATION

The process used to identify students in need of special services must be on-going (extending from school entry through grade twelve), flexible, free of bias, and open to students from all backgrounds.

RECOMMENDATION 4.3.

RANGE OF SERVICES AND EDUCATIONAL OPTIONS

In order to provide the most appropriate and optimal education for students exhibiting a variety of exceptional abilities and outstanding talents, a range of services and educational options must be available.

RECOMMENDATION 4.4.

APPROPRIATELY CHALLENGING CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

Schools should ensure that all students are provided with demanding curricular material, but that gifted and talented students receive instruction that goes beyond the regular school program.

RECOMMENDATION 4.5.

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCE CURRICULUM

A rigorous and challenging curriculum in mathematics and science should be provided for all students, including gifted and talented students who are capable of exceptional performance in these areas, beginning in elementary school and continuing through high school.

RECOMMENDATION 4.6.

ACCELERATION OPTIONS

Any instructional or administrative barriers to appropriate acceleration options, including early entrance to school or college, should be removed. In addition, pre-assessment procedures should be routinely used in the classroom in all curricular areas to determine what students already know so that enriched and extended learning experiences can occur.

RECOMMENDATION 4.7.

GROUPING PRACTICES

Schools should maintain flexible grouping practices that include homogeneous grouping as an appropriate and necessary option for gifted and talented students while ensuring that inappropriate uses of tracking are eliminated.

R E C O M M E N D A T I O N S

Key Question Four: *How should schools identify the needs of gifted and talented students and provide for an appropriate range of services to meet those identified needs?*

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

RECOMMENDATION 4.1: Early childhood education programs should be structured, and teachers in these programs trained, so that talents are nurtured and exceptional abilities are recognized as early as possible.

PERSPECTIVE: "Specific services for the gifted and talented, including instructional programs, should begin in early childhood, respond to individual strengths and needs and constantly aim for the realization of the highest potential of each child."

RATIONALE: Quality instruction should begin in early childhood, respond to individual strengths and needs, and constantly aim for the highest potential for the child. Early childhood programs such as Title I, Extended Elementary Education Program (EEEP) and Headstart, should create awareness of the need to recognize and nurture talent, and MSDE should provide leadership for this change.

Young children need rich, varied learning opportunities and trained teachers who look for strengths and nurture potential. Services to potentially gifted primary children should match their changing developmental needs with emphasis on broad-based knowledge acquisition and problem solving. On the other hand, young children exhibiting advanced mental, social, and psychological maturity should be considered for early admission to kindergarten or grade-level advancement. Ideally, schools should tailor access to unique learning opportunities to match the strengths and needs of each child.

As schools engage in preschool screening for kindergarten, Headstart, and other preschool programs, staff should be alert to early recognition of students' strengths. While noticing students' deficits is very important, early signs of academic potential such as an interest in reading, advanced mathematical understanding or possession of a large fund of knowledge, should also be noted. Early Childhood programs must create a balance that makes provisions for students with advanced skills who need academics early while, at the same time, providing for students with unusual potential who demonstrate problem solving skills but require a more developmental approach to reading and mathematic instruction.

Early identification of gifted students, K-3, is frequently recommended, but seldom implemented. Most gifted services begin in the upper elementary grades. Delaying identification compounds problems associated with finding gifted minority students, especially those students from disadvantaged backgrounds. If such children are not found early, they are unlikely to receive appropriate instruction and may develop a poor academic self-image.

The greatest untapped talent in the nation "lies among the disadvantaged minority populations" (Torrance, 1970; 1977). These students come to school less ready to profit from school experiences. Poverty, lack of early enrichment experiences and differences in language and culture often prevent them from refining and extending their skills. Rich early childhood opportunities can reverse the delays and provide occasions for outstanding gifts and talents to be recognized and nurtured (Gregory, Starnes, & Blaylock, 1987).

"To compete on an equal footing with the rest of the world, we must start our children down the path to excellence when they are very young. Learning is cumulative; all students including the gifted, develop to their full potential only when their special strengths are identified and supported throughout their lives. This is particularly true for economically disadvantaged children because they often face so many impediments to success."

National Excellence: A Case for Developing America's Talent

RECOMMENDATIONS

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ON-GOING AND FLEXIBLE IDENTIFICATION

RECOMMENDATION 4.2: The process used to identify students in need of special services must be on-going (extending from school entry through grade twelve), flexible, free of bias, and open to students from all backgrounds.

PERSPECTIVE: "Identification of gifts and talents must occur as an on-going process extending from school entry through grade twelve. To ensure that students from the full range of backgrounds and talents are identified, schools should consider a variety of indicators of talent and ability."

RATIONALE: If appropriate educational experiences are to be provided, students' needs must be identified. For some students the identification process will be quite easy and the special need obvious. But this is not the case for many other students. For a variety of reasons, students from a number of subgroups are often overlooked and underserved.

In a special issue of The Journal for the Education of the Gifted, Gallagher (1987) referred to the subgroup of gifted children who are poorly recognized and insufficiently supported by services for the gifted and talented as the "gifted underserved." In addition to ethnic minorities, economically disadvantaged, preschool, learning disabled, gifted females and underachievers, this group included all children who suffer neglect because of insufficient conditions and opportunities to nurture, stimulate, and guide them to their full potential. This includes highly able students whose disruptive behavior may prevent them from being recognized as "gifted."

The Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Students Act of 1988 was created to "give highest priority" to gifted students who are traditionally underserved. These underserved students have been described in several studies.

- * Gay (1989) and Ford & Harris (1990) determined that as many as 50% of low SES gifted students enrolled in public schools are not identified by current identification procedures. Tyler-Wood (1992) suggests that the primary reason low SES students do not meet criteria for gifted services is low test scores on verbal subtests.
- * Recent studies (Frasier, 1991) have documented the ratio of non-ethnic/minority students to ethnic/minority students receiving gifted programming as approximately 5:1, a ratio that has persisted since the early 1970's. Relying solely on the performance of a single standardized test offers little understanding of talent among our most capable Black students (Ford & Harris, 1990; Patton, 1992).
- * Tomlinson and colleagues (1993) lament the failure to implement a uniform and consistent procedure for identifying mathematical and scientific abilities among female students at all grade levels.
- * According to Daniels (1983) and others (Fox, Brody, & Tobin, 1983), there exists a group of students who can legitimately be called gifted and yet at the same time be labelled learning disabled. This group remains largely unidentified and insufficiently served (Brody & Mills, in press).

Special strategies that can be used to inform and motivate referrals of all the "gifted underserved" must be evaluated and considered. Furthermore, staff must be adequately trained to recognize talent in these groups. Educators should be provided with the skills needed to recognize the many kinds of characteristics, strengths, talents, and needs represented in these underserved groups. If students with talent from these groups are never recognized and referred, then they will never be represented at the assessment, classification, and placement stages.

R E C O M M E N D A T I O N S

Key Question Four: *How should schools identify the needs of gifted and talented students and provide for an appropriate range of services to meet those identified needs?*

Traditional identification methods have resulted in an under-representation of minorities and other underserved groups receiving gifted services. Districts that use IQ scores as the sole criterion in the identification of gifted and talented students are more likely to discover larger disparities among racial and ethnic groups. Ensuring that students from a full range of backgrounds are identified requires the use of multiple sources of information. Few points have received more consistent support from the literature (Clark, 1993; Feldhusen, 1986; Gallagher, 1993; Renzulli, 1986; Sternberg & Davidson, 1986).

The purpose of identification should be to identify students who need curricular and instructional modifications in their educational program because of documented talent, exceptional academic achievement or aptitude, or clear potential to achieve at a high level. It should be a means to an end and not an end in itself.

"Outstanding talent" or "exceptional ability" should be clearly defined as that portion of the student population in a school whose academic needs are clearly not being met by the regular classroom instruction and curriculum. Specific criteria and procedures should be outlined to assist teachers, administrators, and parents in deciding whether a particular programming option is most appropriate for a particular child or group of students.

Identification should not be viewed as a way of conveying special status on students (i.e., simply placing the "mantle of giftedness" upon students). Likewise, identifying students for "gifted programs" any student could benefit from is not defensible. The identification process adopted by a school should be designed to document academic need and followed by an educational response that can be easily justified as necessary to meet that need.

While definitions may vary somewhat in their emphasis, the identification process should be:

- * **Ongoing.** Developmentally appropriate procedures to recognize talent and unusual potential should begin as early as the preschool years, be integrated with preschool programming, and should be on-going throughout the secondary school years.
- * **Accommodating of variety** - Identification should be designed to look throughout a range of disciplines for students with diverse talents.
- * **Reliant on a variety of assessment measures.** The identification process should consider multiple indicators of talent with information obtained from many sources. Teachers and staff who are trained to look for indicators of talent and exceptional ability can be an invaluable component of the identification process.
- * **Free of bias.** Identification should provide students from all backgrounds with equal access to appropriate academic programming.
- * **Non-exclusionary.** Single test scores should not be used to exclude students from services if other indicators point to a need. On the other hand, the option of using test scores for documenting the need for special programming should be available. Highly able students who have been insufficiently challenged often underachieve in the classroom and may lose the motivation so often equated with gifted behavior. For many of these students, aptitude test scores may be the only indicator of exceptional ability.

