



# Grouping Gifted Learners

*A Position Statement of the  
Minnesota Educators of the Gifted and Talented (MEGT)*

Gifted and talented children and youth are those students with outstanding abilities, identified at preschool, elementary, and secondary levels. These students are capable of high performance when compared to others of similar age, experience, and environment, and represent the diverse populations of our communities. These are students whose potential requires differentiated and challenging educational programs and/or services.

The purpose of this position paper is to advocate for the grouping of gifted students for instruction in order to meet their unique needs. Our goal is to provide rationale, options and recommendations in support of the practice of ability grouping combined with differentiated curriculum and instruction.

## **Benefits of Grouping**

Strong research evidence supports the effectiveness of grouping: enabling students with advanced abilities to be grouped together to receive appropriately challenging instruction. Grouping options include full time ability grouping, cluster grouping, within-class flexible grouping, cross-class/grade grouping and pull-out grouping. Research shows significant academic achievement gains for gifted learners who are grouped with others of similar interest and abilities. Also, ability grouping is found to have positive effects on motivation and attitudes towards learning, as well as helping gifted learners to develop a more realistic self perception. Further, research finds that this strategy, when used flexibly, elevates the level of challenge and learning, providing benefits for all children. This affirms the legitimacy of teachers providing challenge across all ability levels.



## **Issues & Recommendations**

Ability grouping has come under attack in recent years in an often heated debate over equity, access and excellence. In efforts to transform schools with the goals of improving the general level of achievement for all students, reformers have eliminated most forms of ability grouping, replacing it with mixed-ability classrooms in which whole-group and cooperative learning are the major academic grouping options. As a result, this reform has seen the elimination of accelerated classes and programs for the gifted. (Rogers, 1991)

### Equity

Tracking is a system which sorts all children into fixed layers in the school system with little attention to particular content, student motivation, past accomplishment or present potential.

### ***Recommendations:***


-  Ability grouping should be flexible. Decision-making about ability grouping should always include ongoing assessment of students' readiness, interests and/or needs.
-  Schools have many choices. There are a number of grouping options which produce academic gains for gifted learners. Those include full time ability grouping, cluster grouping, within-class flexible grouping, cross-class/grade grouping and pull-out grouping. Decisions should be based upon the needs of the students and the resources available to the school.



## Access

Many students have been underrepresented or underserved in gifted programs due to economic disadvantage, limited English, or learning disabilities.



### ***Recommendation:***

-  Special consideration should be given to the identification and assessment of diverse learners for gifted programs and ability groupings. (For more information see MEGT position paper: *Responding to the Needs of Diverse Gifted Learners*)

## Curriculum and Instruction

“What” gifted students will be taught is equally as important as how they will be grouped (Rogers, 2004). Teachers often lack the training and education in the area of gifted education.


### ***Recommendations:***

-  Curriculum for gifted learners should focus on developing content expertise leading to the development of concepts, principles and generalizations, critical and creative thinking and problem solving. Grouping allows for more rapid, advanced and complex instruction which matches the developing skills and capabilities of gifted learners.
-  Teachers should have ongoing staff development and support focused on the needs of gifted learners, gifted pedagogy and differentiation.

## Excellence

As with any program or instructional decision, it is essential to continually assess the effectiveness of grouping decisions through regular assessments of student achievement gains and attitudes toward learning and school.

### ***Recommendation:***

-  Program evaluation should include an examination of the effectiveness of the grouping option(s), the quality of the curriculum and the differentiation of the curriculum.

## **References**

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