



# Responding to the Needs of Gifted Learners; Differentiating within the Common Core Standards

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

[www.mnegt.org](http://www.mnegt.org)

## Purpose

Across the country, there is a movement to adopt the national Common Core State Standards (CCSS) to provide a consistent, clear understanding of what students are expected to learn. The standards were designed to be robust and relevant to the real world, reflecting the knowledge and skills needed for success in college and careers. Minnesota has adopted the Common Core English Language Arts Standards.

While the K-12 CCSS define end-of-year requirements and a progression designed to enable students to meet college and career readiness expectations, they do not specifically address those who have mastered the standards at their grade level or who could manage more depth and complexity than the standards describe. Additionally, there is inherent conflict between adherence to standards while differentiating to ensure access for the spectrum of learners in a class.

This position paper provides educators with an awareness of the need to grapple with the CCSS to support the academic achievement of advanced learners. The goal is to present issues and make recommendations to help teachers and administrators develop strategies to address the needs of advanced learners within the context of the CCSS.

## Concerns








The grade-level specific nature of the CCSS does not account for continuous progress and/or acceleration through the standards, implying that one size fits all. Many gifted students are well able to meet, and exceed, the core standards on a faster timetable than their age peers. According to the NAGC, “For some students – those at the top end of the performance spectrum – fidelity to grade-level standards can actually limit learning.”

Pre-assessment/formative assessment, identified as best practice in successful classrooms, is not embedded in the CCSS. Quality assessment results drive instruction and those assessment results would provide evidence that some students are ready for learning beyond the grade level standard.

Many schools across Minnesota and throughout the nation have adopted the use of professional learning communities (PLCs). One of the common expectations of Dufour’s PLC model identifies questions that guide instruction. The fourth question states, “How will we enrich and extend the learning for students who have demonstrated proficiency?” In best practice classrooms, answering that question may seem formidable. Lack of time and support may prevent teachers from addressing the needs of the advanced learners who have mastered the standard. This is more likely to happen under the belief that the CCSS grade-level standards adequately and sufficiently meet the needs of all students.



## **Recommendations**

-  Students who demonstrate proficiency on a grade level standard should be afforded the opportunity for continuous progress into higher level standards.
-  Students should participate in differentiated assessment; i.e. performance-based or portfolio techniques aligned with higher-level learning.
-  Learning should be designed to include advanced content, using rubrics to ensure rigor, accelerated pace, depth, complexity, creative production, and differentiated instruction.
-  Teachers must engage in ongoing professional development to ensure they know the standards in depth, including those preceding and following their grade level, in order to effectively differentiate.
-  Teachers must engage in ongoing professional development to gain a deeper understanding of strategies that nurture complex and in depth learning, including problem solving and inquiry learning.
-  Curriculum for gifted students should align to the CCSS, but not be limited to the concepts defined in the CCSS.
-  Position papers available at [www.mnegt.org](http://www.mnegt.org) should be accessed to support the advocacy for rigorous, differentiated instruction for advanced learners.

## **Resources**

Common Core Standards website: <http://www.corestandards.org>

DuFour, Rick. "Questions New Teams Should Consider Early On." September 4, 2008.  
<http://www.allthingsplc.info>

Johnsen, Susan; Sheffield, Linda. (2012) Using the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts with Gifted and Advanced Learners. Prufrock Press, TX.

Johnsen, Susan. "Gifted Education and the Common Core State Standards." Gifted Child Today (2012) 35:81.  
<http://gct.sagepub.com/content/35/2/81.refs>

NAGC website: <http://www.nagc.org/CommonCoreStateStandards.aspx>

VanTassel-Baska, Joyce, Ed.D. (2012) Using the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts with Gifted and Advanced Learners. Prufrock Press, TX.

