



Responding to the Needs of High School Level Gifted Learners

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

Purpose

Gifted high school learners, typically in grades 9-12, are found throughout all geographic regions and cultures as well as within all socio-economic, racial, and ethnic groups. The purpose of this position paper is to advocate for the specific academic and affective needs of high school gifted learners. A comprehensive high school program should be the culmination of a carefully planned K-12 continuum of services offered to gifted learners. For gifted students to be meaningfully served during high school, the transition between levels of schooling (middle to high school and high school to post secondary) should be seamless. When a student is ready for further challenge, age or grade should not be used as a basis for restricting opportunities. Our goal is to present issues and make recommendations based on relevant research and best practice to guide advocates in the development, implementation, and support of appropriate services.

Issues

Since gifted students make up a small part of the total high school population, resources are often directed to programs that benefit larger groups of students. Additionally, state and federal mandates aimed at under-achieving students limit resources for high-achieving students, the attitude frequently being “they don’t need it; they will make it on their own.” All students in high school should make annual yearly progress, including gifted students, but several issues impact the opportunities gifted students need to increase their achievement.

-  Administrators, school board members, and other educational personnel lack an understanding of characteristics and needs of high school gifted students.
-  Schools may not be able to offer a variety of appropriate, rigorous course choices for gifted students.
-  School system policies and procedures, such as scheduling, course credit requirements and other logistical issues, often restrict the flexibility necessary to meet gifted students’ needs.
-  Pre-service and ongoing in-service opportunities for educational personnel in the area of gifted education are lacking, particularly at the secondary level.
-  Where rigorous courses and gifted programs do exist, minority populations are under represented.
-  An over-emphasis on class rank and grade point average diminishes a focus on depth and rigor of course work.
-  Uneven development in gifted students entering high school makes it difficult to recognize talents and to program appropriately.



Recommendations

-  Include administration, teaching staff, and counselors in professional development initiatives.
-  Provide staff development opportunities at the high school level that address the characteristics of gifted students and their academic and social needs.
-  Ensure that gifted funding and resources equitably compare to the funding for other local programs.
-  Employ a gifted program coordinator and a counselor with responsibility for gifted students at the high school level.
-  Establish multiple academic pathways at the most rigorous levels, including College in the Schools (CIS), Post Secondary Education Options (PSEO), Advanced Placement (AP), and International Baccalaureate (IB). Offer a continuum of services, including but not limited to, differentiated instruction, study abroad, mentorships, internships, distance learning, summer programs, specialized schools, independent study, and test prep programs.
-  Offer opportunities to develop leadership, creative and critical thinking, and problem-solving abilities in students.
-  Establish procedures to award high school credit for mastery of applicable state standards.
-  Implement well-defined curricula, which include social awareness and adjustment, academic planning, and vocational and career awareness.
-  Develop and implement a program of academic incentives and awards for successful achievement in rigorous coursework and co-curricular activities.
-  Identify minority students and underachievers who may need educational support to attain placement into advanced program options.
-  Provide support to parents to ensure their sustained participation in their child's education.

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