

## Appropriately Serving New Mexico Gifted Students

The New Mexico Association for the Gifted (NMAG) recognizes the importance of providing all children educational opportunities to develop their abilities to the maximum. Gifted students, like other special groups in the school population, possess unique abilities, interests, and needs which can be addressed only through appropriate identification, differentiating the regular curriculum and designing specialized individualized services.

NMAG endorses nine major components in appropriately serving gifted students:

1. Mandated State Definition
2. Mandated Appropriate Assessments considering factors
3. Appropriate Services on a continuum including early entrance, acceleration, dual enrollment, etc.
4. Individual Services through a Gifted Education Plan
5. Highly Qualified teachers for Gifted.
6. Prescribed Caseloads
7. Dedicated or Add on Funding for Gifted
8. Procedural Safeguards
9. Gifted Advisory Committee

NMAG endorses the state definition “As used in 6.31.2.12 NMAC, “**gifted child**” means a school-age person as defined in Sec. 22-13-6(D) NMSA 1978 whose intellectual ability paired with subject matter aptitude/achievement, creativity/divergent thinking, or problem-solving/critical thinking meets the eligibility criteria in 6.31.2.12 NMAC and for whom a properly constituted IEP team determines that special education services are required to meet the child’s educational needs.” A state definition allows for identification and service of gifted students from all cultural groups, across all economic strata, and in all areas of human endeavor.

NMAG endorses an identification process that ensures that all gifted students are recognized so they can be appropriately served. It is important that the process identify students performing at remarkably high levels of accomplishment as well as those who are showing the potential for performing at remarkably high levels when compared with other students of a similar age, experience, or environment. NMAG believes that all children are eligible for the referral process regardless of their socioeconomic, linguistic, or cultural background and /or disabilities.

In order to provide effective programs and curriculum for gifted students, research indicates that a continuum of services must be offered that can meet a wide range of abilities, interests, and learning styles. Such services need to include a combination of acceleration, flexible grouping based on interest, ability, and need, and differentiation of the core curriculum through depth, complexity, and novelty of instruction and materials. Programs for gifted learners should provide for continuous progress, continuity, intellectual peer interaction, and services that challenge the students at their individual level of academic and intellectual development. NMAG endorses offering these services through an individualized plan such as the Individualized Education Program (IEP) or Gifted Education Plan (GEP) and implemented as an integral part of each school day.

NMAG believes that all learners deserve the highest quality of instruction possible and that such instruction will only occur when teachers are aware of and able to respond to the unique qualities and characteristics of the students they instruct. Gifted learners present a particular challenge and experience an adequate and appropriate education when their teachers are highly qualified to teach the gifted. To provide appropriate learning experiences for gifted learners, teachers need to possess the following competencies:

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- a knowledge and valuing of the origins and nature of high levels of intelligence,
- including creative expressions of intelligence;
- a knowledge and understanding of the cognitive, social, and emotional characteristics, needs, and potential problems experienced by gifted learners from diverse populations;
- a knowledge of and access to advanced content and ideas;
- an ability to develop a differentiated curriculum appropriate to meeting the unique intellectual and emotional needs and interests of gifted learners; and
- an ability to create an environment in which gifted learners can feel challenged and safe to explore, take risks, and express their uniqueness.

NMAG believes in caseload limits for teachers of the gifted. Appropriate caseload sizes lead to significant differences in students' academic engaged time, task completion, and task success instruction. It is only with appropriate caseload sizes that teachers of the gifted will fulfill their responsibility for meeting the needs and nurturing the potential of gifted students.

The federal government mandates and funds numerous other educational concerns and issues through a number of entitlement programs, but when it comes to gifted education, providing the resources and protection to nurture the country's greatest intellectual 'gifts,' everything is left to the states and localities. When state level add-on funding is not provided local school districts themselves are not consistent. Like most schooling issues, gifted education takes money to support, and when funding is left to the local districts that have their own financial concerns, when cuts have to be made, gifted education is often first on the list. NMAG endorses state level add-on funding to maintain consistent services for gifted across the state.

Providing parents with procedural safeguards is critical to ensuring that they have the opportunity to be partners in the decisions regarding their children. NMAG endorses parents to be actively involved and to participate in catering for the needs of gifted children and students. Parents are their children's first and most influential educators. They therefore have a unique knowledge and understanding of their children.

NMAG endorses a provision for Gifted Advisory Committees. Parents and community members have expertise, interests and skills which can enrich the life of a school. Their involvement can broaden the range of options available for gifted students and children through community involvement activities, mentor programs and the involvement of tertiary institutions. The advisory committee will reflect the cultural diversity of the enrollment of the school district and shall:

- regularly review the goals and priorities of the gifted program, including the operational plans for student identification, evaluation, placement and service delivery;
- demonstrate support for the gifted program;
- provide information regarding the impact that cultural background, linguistic background, socioeconomic status and disability conditions within the community may have on the child referral, identification, evaluation and service delivery processes;
- advocate for children who have been under-represented in gifted services due to cultural or linguistic background, socioeconomic status, or disability conditions, in order to ensure that these children have equal opportunities to benefit from services for gifted students

There are approximately 13,200 gifted students in New Mexico; however without these nine components, our gifted students may not reach their highest potential

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### Resources

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