

Responding to the Needs of Middle Level Gifted Learners

A Position Statement of the

Minnesota Educators of the Gifted and Talented (MEGT)

Purpose

Middle level gifted learners are found throughout all socioeconomic, racial, and cultural groups. Gifted learners need a continuum of services throughout their K-12 experience. Adolescent learners have distinctive cognitive and affective development traits, which often become more pronounced during middle level years. While adolescents are served in a variety of school settings, gifted adolescents need purposeful programming to receive instruction that is at an appropriate developmental and challenge level. The purpose of this position statement is to advocate for the academic and affective needs of middle gifted learners. Our goal is to provide relevant information to help individuals develop and implement appropriate services for these adolescents.

Issues

Services for gifted learners at the middle school level have been frequently reduced or eliminated in recent years because of some individuals' perceptions that gifted education practices are incompatible with middle school philosophy. The reality is, however, that advocates in both fields espouse many of the same beliefs and strategies. For example, both recommend theme-based and interdisciplinary curriculum and instruction that promotes self-understanding. Both groups share a deep concern for the cognitive and affective welfare of students. The problem is that in an effort to be equitable and meet the needs of all students, many middle schools have implemented one-size-fits-all educational services within heterogeneously grouped classrooms. The main areas of concern about the education of middle level gifted learners are:

Overemphasis on heterogeneous grouping and misuse of cooperative learning

Limited use of critical and creative thinking skills within the curriculum

Low expectations and limited academic rigor

Inadequate teacher training on how to differentiate instruction

Insufficient support for gifted adolescents' unique affective needs

Recommendations

Statement: Middle level gifted learners may display asynchronous development in academic and social/emotional development. Middle level gifted learners need time with their intellectual peers to enhance self-awareness and affective development.

Recommendation:

This recommendation can be met by ensuring that adults working with these individuals be knowledgeable of the specific needs of learners with unique gifts and talents.

Statement: Middle level gifted learners must be provided with appropriate and intellectually challenging curriculum.

Recommendation:

This recommendation can be met by differentiating instruction according to student readiness, interest, and learning styles. The content should be complex, concept-focused, and principle-driven.

Statement: Middle level gifted learners must be provided with experiences that allow for problem-centered, creative, and critical thinking opportunities.

Recommendation:

This recommendation may be met by providing opportunities for inquiry, thematic and inter-disciplinary study, and independent investigations.

Statement: Educators who serve middle level gifted learners must be offered extensive professional development opportunities on how to meet the needs of this population.

Recommendation:

This recommendation includes professional development on the characteristics and needs of gifted adolescents, methods for implementing curriculum differentiation, and flexible grouping practices.

Statement: Recognizing that this population has diverse talents and needs, a continuum of services should be provided.

Recommendation:

This recommendation can be met by having a variety of gifted education programs and services available to students, including mentorships, accelerated curriculum, enriched classes, academic competitions and creativity programs, collaborative learning opportunities, dual enrollment options, and differentiated curriculum in the regular classroom.

Statement: Successful programs for meeting the needs of middle level gifted learners require administrative support and strong leadership.

Recommendation:

This recommendation requires that specific person(s) should be given the responsibility to develop and plan the delivery of gifted education services.

References

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