

Introduction

HOW WE GOT HERE

When *Designing Services and Programs for High-Ability Learners: A Guidebook for Gifted Education* was released as a service publication of the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) in 2006, it was the first text in more than 30 years to provide practical, comprehensive advice for developing and supporting high-quality programs and services for gifted students. A decade later, this handbook for educators, administrators, and university personnel continues to fill the need for research-based, practical guidance about how to best utilize resources to meet the needs of gifted students.

Believe it or not, much of the correspondence with first-edition authors and reviewers was through the U.S. Postal Service and the trusty NAGC fax machine. This reminds us that although the publication of the original guidebook seems like it occurred just yesterday, the world in which we—and our students—live moves at an increasingly rapid pace. Therefore, the goal for this text is to update and continue the comprehensive discussion of practical issues related to the provision of educational opportunities for gifted and talented students begun with the publication of the first edition a decade ago. Each of the chapters is focused on a key feature or aspect of gifted education and provides detailed guidelines to help new or experienced practitioners create and sustain these programs and services.

HOW THIS BOOK IS DIFFERENT

Much has been written about gifted education, and what we know is contained in countless monographs, journal articles, dissertations, position papers, videos, and books; however, the options are still limited for practitioners seeking a consolidated and comprehensive discussion of the numerous practical issues related to services and programs for high-achieving students. Although robust standards have been articulated for the field, there continue to be few publications that provide detailed guidelines to help new or experienced practitioners create and sustain gifted programs and services. This guidebook does both. We hope it provides a comprehensive discussion of the key features that characterize programs and services for the gifted. In addition, we provide guidelines, practical

tips, templates, and suggestions to help practitioners determine where they are now, where they are going, and how they are doing along the way.

FOR WHOM IS THIS BOOK WRITTEN?

This book contains practical, research-based information about the key features of successful programs and services for high-ability learners, so a wide variety of audiences will find this guidebook helpful. Teachers of the gifted and talented and specialists who have major responsibilities for program or service delivery will be able to use this book as a reference. District administrators, charged with monitoring the development of services for high-achieving students, will be able to use this book as a road-map to help identify the services that currently exist and as a compass to identify how services can be enhanced. Advocates for enhanced opportunities for gifted students can use this book as a reference for defining exemplar programs and services. State directors for the gifted and talented, who play leadership roles in their respective states, can use this publication as a manual to support their work with school districts. This guidebook can be readily understood by those who are new to the field as well as those who have years of experience in gifted education. In these times of turnover in district positions, the guidebook can provide continuity when leadership changes. Finally, university personnel who teach introductory courses in gifted education can use this publication.

THE BOOK'S STRUCTURE

The book contains 17 chapters that address key features of gifted education programs and services. Readers will recognize many of the updated topics that are included such as construction of identification procedures, advocacy, and program evaluation, for example. Other key features, reflecting current trends in education, have been added to this new edition: collaborating with families, aligning programs and services with national standards, and developing local policies to support gifted education. In addition, the NAGC Pre-K–Grade 12 Gifted Programming Standards, which were updated in 2010, can be found in Appendix B, page 261.

In an effort to provide consistency and structure for those who select to read the book from beginning to end or as isolated chapters, chapters in the book share parallel components to elucidate key features of services and programs for high-ability learners:

- **Definition:** A definition is provided to ensure a common understanding of the key feature under consideration.
- **Rationale:** This section explains the critical importance of the key feature and outlines current research to guide decisions about the development or redesign of programs and services for gifted students.

- **Guiding Principles and Attributes That Define High Quality:** Chapter authors provide a parsimonious list of assumptions and high-quality markers that form the foundation of each key feature and determine the effective implementation of an aspect of programming. This ensures that those charged with creating or supporting programs and services can assess the overall effectiveness of each key feature.
- **Example in Need of Revision:** We asked authors to reflect on their experiences in the field and to generate a carefully crafted example of the key feature gone awry. Examples, as well as exemplars, help us clearly understand what we are seeking.
- **Makeover Example:** The revised example in each chapter serves as a contrast to the lackluster example and makes explicit the differences between a less-than-satisfactory implementation of gifted services and programs and one that is of high quality. This section includes a brief description of what is wrong with the lackluster example, as well as strategies used to improve it, and the improved result from these efforts. The lackluster example and the exemplar provide readers with bookends, so to speak, to help them better understand the continuum of quality in the field and to keep us aiming for excellence.
- **Advice for Getting Started:** Too often we underestimate the amount of time and effort that will be required to create or redesign a key feature of gifted education programs or services. Therefore, this section provides a strategic plan to uncover the complex process that is required to develop high-quality features of programs and services. Many chapters also include a graphic organizer or configuration map to guide reflection and planning with regard to the key feature under consideration. The goal with this section is to help readers jump-start the creation or remodeling process.
- **Advice for the Sole Practitioner:** In many instances, educators or advocates may be working on their own to conceptualize, plan, or implement services and programs for gifted students. Because the enormity of this task can be quite daunting, targeted advice and guidance is provided to improve the likelihood of success for practitioners working alone.
- **Suggested Resources:** Authors for each chapter were selected for their expertise related to the key feature, and they have a working knowledge of resources that deal with that aspect of gifted programming. We asked them to select a few suggested resources that would be most beneficial to practitioners seeking additional information on the topic.

NEXT STEPS

Although the isolation of key features of gifted education within individual chapters is somewhat artificial, the hope is that this structure will allow

readers to better appreciate the function and subtleties of these program components and use this knowledge in their own contexts to navigate the complex and multifaceted process of designing services and programs for gifted and talented students. Although grounded in research and guided by the NAGC Pre-K–Grade 12 Gifted Programming Standards, the practical insights and advice found in this text are only the beginning of the journey toward the development and/or expansion of high-quality educational services for gifted students. We encourage you to seek out opportunities to discuss and share the ideas in this guidebook (either in person or online). We also urge you to take this base and expand on it, providing up-to-date information for your schools and classrooms for years to come. These continued efforts and further collaboration will provide the gateway to the future of gifted education.

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