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INTRODUCTION

This is a guide to evaluating programs for gifted students. It does not however, assume that a particular type of program is, or should be, operating. Rather it assumes that you are in the best position to determine your needs and then, based on that assumption, guides you through the process of documenting relevant dimensions of the program. These dimensions are then rated based on internal consistency criteria. That is, the program is evaluated based on how consistently the needs assessment, objectives, instruction and the evaluation dimensions are operationally defined and interrelated. A wide variety of programs may be evaluated with this approach.

Program evaluation may be designed to address either of two major questions; "Is the program functioning at maximum efficiency?" and/or "Is the program fulfilling its intended purpose?" The first question is a process evaluation, that is, "Are each of the program components efficiently contributing to the total set of program goals?" Process evaluation is concerned primarily with obtaining information that may be used by instructional management decision-makers in bringing the program to its maximum operating efficiency.

The second question is summative, that is, "Is the program doing what it was originally intended to do?" Or, in other words, "Is the program worth the time, energy, and expense now being allocated to its maintenance?" Information obtained for a summative evaluation is designed to support a decision, vis-a-vis program continuation. This decision is to a certain degree subjective, that is, a value judgment. A valid decision regarding continuation of a program can be made, however, only if information gathered in the decision-making process is reflecting the best operating conditions that can be established under prevailing circumstances. A decision to discontinue a program operating at less than peak efficiency is simply a statement that an inefficient program is no longer worth the expense and/or effort. Although this is certainly a legitimate decision - it is different than saying - the program does not meet the needs originally defined. The latter is also a legitimate, but obviously, very different decision. Maximal operating conditions leading to a valid summative decision are established by first applying process evaluation techniques. Process evaluation strategies are generally applied during the first three to five years of program operation. During this time, all the "bugs" are being worked out and the program hopefully achieves its maximum operative efficiency.

At this point in time we find that many gifted program developers are concerned primarily with the question of process evaluation. That is, evaluation that provides feedback for instructional management decision makers to act upon in moving gifted programs to their maximum operating efficiency. We see a major shift in this evaluation emphasis in the next three to five years from a current emphasis on formative (process) evaluation toward summative (product) evaluation. Funding sources, including both boards of education, and state and