

Contents

Series Preface	1
Introduction	3
Identifying Characteristics of Gifted and Talented Students and Program Options	6
Selecting Multiple Assessments	20
Developing an Identification Procedure The Ensures Equal Access	25
Implementing the Identification Procedure	33
Organizing Assessment Information, Interpreting Results, and Selecting Students	39
Evaluating and Revising Assessment Procedures	53
Conclusion	64
References	65
Appendix: Forms for Use in Implementing the Identification Process	69

Introduction

This publication will provide directors and coordinators of programs for gifted and talented students with a specific step-by-step plan for developing an identification procedure in a school or school district. While the sections of this publication are laid out sequentially according to the steps, identification is an ongoing process. For example, more complexity and depth in the curriculum may create opportunities for new students to be identified. New program options in the visual and performing arts may uncover the talents of budding artists. Some students may transfer into the school, while others may furlough or exit from the gifted program. In all cases, the goal of identification is to ensure that every gifted and talented student who needs a program that is different from the general education curriculum receives one that is matched to his or her specific characteristics.

Before beginning the step-by-step plan, administrators will want to form a committee that will collaborate in designing the identification procedure. This committee should be comprised of the coordinator or director of the gifted program, principals who are respected among their colleagues, teachers in gifted and in general education, parents who are active in the school

community, and any other administrators who need to be involved to ensure the success of the plan.

This guide is organized around the following sequence of steps that a committee might follow in establishing an identification procedure:

- Step 1: Identify characteristics of gifted and talented students and program options.
- Step 2: Select multiple assessments that match these characteristics and programs.
- Step 3: Develop an identification procedure that ensures equal access.
- Step 4: Implement the identification procedure.
- Step 5: Organize assessment information, interpret results, and select students.
- Step 6: Evaluate and revise assessment procedures.

This publication is organized into six sections:

Identifying Characteristics of Gifted and Talented Students and Program Options—emphasizes the heterogeneity of this special group. Specific characteristics are provided for each of the areas in the federal definition of giftedness: general intellectual ability, specific academic fields, leadership, creativity, and the arts. Possible program options are then matched to these characteristics.

Selecting Multiple Assessments—begins with a discussion of the need for multiple assessments. Specific criteria are then presented to assist the identification committee in determining the technical adequacy of quantitative and qualitative assessments.

Developing an Identification Procedure That Ensures Equal Access—describes the three phases of identification (nomination, screening, and selection), followed by a brief overview of due process procedures. A specific checklist developed by the Office for Civil Rights is included so that districts may ensure equal access at each phase of the identification procedure.

Implementing the Identification Procedure—outlines an implementation calendar. Involvement of important stakeholders and the board of trustees is also emphasized along with professional development of everyone involved in the identification process.

Organizing Assessment Information, Interpreting Results, and Selecting Students—provides a variety of forms used in organizing assessment information. Example cases illustrate three different formats: case study, minimum scores, and profiles. Each of these formats also incorporates important guidelines for ensuring technical adequacy.

Evaluating and Revising Assessment Procedures—examines the important activity of evaluation. Six steps are outlined: (1) identifying evaluation questions, (2) selecting data sources and instruments, (3) matching the methods with the evaluation questions, (4) interpreting data, (5) writing the report, and (6) implementing recommendations.

I would like to thank directors of gifted and talented programs who have shared their successes (and a few failures) in developing effective identification procedures for their school districts. This publication will be useful in finding those students who require a gifted education.

Identifying Characteristics of Gifted and Talented Students and Program Options

The first step in establishing a comprehensive program for gifted and talented students is for the identification committee to become familiar with the characteristics of gifted and talented students and specific program options that might match these characteristics. For example, consider the following students:

- James is a kindergarten student who is already reading at the fifth-grade level and solving math problems at the fourth-grade level. His teacher says that he is particularly interested in black holes and frequents the science section of the school library. While small for his age, he is also interested in athletics, having memorized all of the player statistics of the local football teams.
- LaTasha began taking music lessons at age 4. By the time she was 8, she was a proficient cellist, playing in the statewide youth symphony, which was quite an honor since all of the other performers were high school students. LaTasha has already decided that she wants to be a professional musician.

- Brandon was retained in two grades at the primary level because he didn't pass the grade-level reading assessments. His fourth-grade teacher was concerned because he wasn't making progress, and she didn't want him to fail again. The assistant principal in the school had observed Brandon and felt that he was choosing not to perform in the regular classroom. She decided to administer a reading test to Brandon in her office and discovered that he was actually reading on the sixth-grade level. She also found that he performed in the top 1% on a creativity test. After a parent conference, the school learned that Brandon had been putting his time and energy into building a rocket at home using scraps from garbage cans.
- Amanda was part of a team of students whose teacher required them to research the needs of their community. Upon finding that no affordable retirement homes were available to the elderly, she decided to organize a fund-raising campaign to change the situation. By the time she was finished, one of the community leaders had donated land for the project, while others had matched initial contributions. Within 2 years, the retirement home was built and ready for occupants.

All of these vignettes are based on true stories of gifted students and show the variety of characteristics they might exhibit. This variation is apparent in the United States federal definition of gifted and talented students:

The term “gifted and talented” when used in respect to students, children, or youth means students, children, or youth who give evidence of high performance capability in areas such as intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership capacity, or in specific academic fields, and who require services or activities not ordinarily

provided by the school in order to fully develop such capabilities. (P.L. 103-382, Title XIV, p. 388)

In the described cases, James gives evidence of high performance capability in intellectual and specific academic fields; Brandon in creativity; LaTasha in the arts; and Amanda in leadership. While each of the students provides examples that would indicate a gift or talent, not all perform equally well in the school setting. In fact, Brandon might have been overlooked except for the astute observations of an assistant principal. Those who are involved in the identification of students will want to consider the environment as an important influencing factor on student behaviors.

The majority of professionals in gifted education would agree that abilities are not exhibited independently of the environment or other factors. Tannenbaum (1983) identified these influencing factors as general ability (e.g., general intelligence), special ability (e.g., aptitude in a specific area), non-intellective facilitators (e.g., mental learning, commitment, strong self-concept, mental health, willingness to sacrifice), environmental influences (e.g., parents, classroom, peers, culture, social class), and chance. Similarly, Gagné (1995, 1999) has described the development of gifts into talents as being facilitated by intrapersonal and environmental catalysts. Intrapersonal catalysts are influenced by genetic background and include physical (e.g., health, physical appearance) and psychological (e.g., motivation, personality, and volition) factors. Environmental catalysts are surroundings (e.g., geographic, demographic, sociological), people (e.g., parents, teachers, siblings, peers), undertakings (e.g., programs for gifted and talented students), and events (e.g., divorce, changing schools, winning an award). In identifying gifted and talented students, observers need to consider not only the characteristic lists that are presented in this section, but also the opportunities that a student might have in exhibiting these characteristics.

Characteristics of Gifted Students

The characteristics of gifted and talented students are organized around the federal definition. These lists are summaries of characteristics noted by researchers in the field of gifted education.

General Intellectual Ability

Students who have general intellectual ability tend to show the potential to perform well in more than one area. Researchers have identified the following characteristics as relating to this area of giftedness:

- has an extensive and detailed memory, particularly in an area of interest;
- has vocabulary advanced for age—precocious language;
- has communication skills advanced for age and is able to express ideas and feelings;
- asks intelligent questions;
- is able to identify the important characteristics of new concepts and problems;
- learns information quickly;
- uses logic in arriving at common sense answers;
- has a broad base of knowledge—a large quantity of information;
- understands abstract ideas and complex concepts;
- uses analogical thinking, problem solving, or reasoning;
- observes relationships and sees connections;
- finds and solves difficult and unusual problems;
- understands principles, forms generalizations, and uses them in new situations;
- wants to learn and is curious;
- works conscientiously and has a high degree of concentration in areas of interest;
- understands and uses various symbol systems; and

- is reflective about learning (Clark, 1997; Colangelo & Davis, 1991; Coleman & Cross, 2001; Davis & Rimm, 1994; Gilliam, Carpenter, & Christensen, 1996; Khatena, 1992; Piirto, 1999; Renzulli, Smith, White, Callahan, Harman, & Westberg, 2002; Rogers, 2001; Ryser & McConnell, 2004; Sternberg & Davidson, 1986; Swassing, 1985; Tannenbaum, 1983).

Specific Academic Field

Some gifted and talented students exhibit potential or demonstrated accomplishment in one specific field of study. Such a student tends to exhibit these characteristics:

General (demonstrated within field of interest)

- has an intense, sustained interest;
- has hobbies/collections related to field;
- is attracted to cognitive complexity—enjoys solving complex problems;
- prefers classes/careers in the academic field;
- is highly self-motivated and persistent;
- has a broad base of knowledge;
- reads widely in an academic field;
- learns information quickly;
- has an inquisitive nature and asks good questions;
- examines and recalls details;
- recognizes critical elements and details in learning concepts;
- analyzes problems and considers alternatives;
- understands abstract ideas and concepts;
- uses vocabulary beyond grade level;
- verbalizes complex concepts and processes;
- visualizes images and translates into other forms—written, spoken, symbolic—music notation, numbers, letters; and