

Common Core and Next Generation Science Standards for Gifted and Talented Students

The adoption of Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in English language arts and mathematics and Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) for K-12 students by a large majority of states is having a profound influence on curriculum, instruction, and assessment in classrooms across the country. The content standards initiatives are part of a national effort to define critical elements of college and career readiness and to raise expectations for all learners. The content standards are intended to promote higher levels of learning for all students and to promote the kinds of instructional strategies that have long been advocated in gifted education, including emphasis on analytical thinking, reasoning, and problem-solving skills. Such efforts to promote high-level learning for all students show promise for improving student achievement across the United States, but the message that high-level learning experiences are important for all must be coupled with a recognition that even with increased rigor and higher standards, some students will still require experiences beyond what the standards specify to show ongoing learning growth. Even rigorous standards for all learners may result in limits on learning for advanced students if schools tie the benchmarks for student achievement too closely to grade-level expectations. Thus, while supporting the effort to promote rigorous content standards for all learners, the National Association for Gifted Children also calls for attention to the specific needs of gifted learners in the implementation of the national content standards and their corresponding assessments.

Gifted and talented students typically grasp curriculum concepts more quickly and deeply than their age peers. They achieve grade-level expectations earlier than specified in the standards and generally need far fewer instructional and practice experiences to achieve mastery. To make continuous progress in their areas of talent, gifted students need learning experiences that extend and enrich the standards and require students to apply complex, creative, and innovative thinking to authentic problems. The developers of the CCSS and NGSS have acknowledged individual differences of gifted students noting that some students will master the standards before grade 12, and that it is up to educators to extend the learning goals and objectives beyond the standards to meet their needs.

This acknowledgement means that effective implementation of the standards requires specific instructional strategies and curricular materials, including modified formative and summative assessments, for advanced and gifted students whose levels of learning exceed grade-level expectations. Effective instruction using CCSS and NGSS for gifted students will require extensive professional development on the standards and the assessment systems, sufficient materials and personnel resources to support implementation, and reasonable expectations regarding the time required for learning new instructional practices. In addition, effective and comprehensive implementation of the content standards requires systematic attention to the growth of each learner. For gifted learners, such opportunities for growth will require concerted efforts from states, school districts, and building leaders to support the implementation of curricula that are sufficiently advanced.

These recommendations reflect a number of concerns in the translation and implementation of the standards into classroom practice. For example, providing differentiated methods and materials in the typical classroom for a heterogeneous group of learners, including those who are struggling or below grade level, may diminish attention to the needs of gifted and advanced learners. Moreover, the assessment process may further limit attention to the needs of advanced learners, especially if the assessments do not support demonstration of above-grade achievement due to low ceilings and instead are linked only to specific grade-level standards and related performance indicators. Assessment developers must consider how student performance above expected levels may be assessed in ways that will provide information useful for instructional planning.

To ensure that gifted children receive the advanced content and experiences they need to grow and learn, NAGC calls on states, school districts, and curriculum and assessment developers to implement the standards in ways that respond to gifted learners' pace and depth of learning. Doing this effectively will require substantial opportunities for professional development, resources that address instructional practices for exceptional learners, and assessments that reflect sufficient room for student growth. Only with such comprehensive support can the standards – and the learners – achieve their potential.

References and Resources

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The National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) is an organization of parents, teachers, educators, other professionals, and community leaders who unite to address the unique needs of children and youth with demonstrated gifts and talents as well as those children who may be able to develop their talent potential with appropriate educational experiences.

All position papers are approved by the NAGC Board of Directors and remain consistent with the organization's position that education in a democracy must respect the uniqueness of all individuals, the broad range of cultural diversity present in our society, and the similarities and differences in learning characteristics that can be found within any group of students. NAGC Position Papers can be found at www.nagc.org.