

Recommendations for Providing Levels of Services for Gifted and Advanced Students



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Advisory Council on the Education of
Gifted and Talented Students
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Recommendations for Action

This document provides guidance for establishing a levels of services (LoS) model for gifted and advanced learners. The Advisory Council on the Education of Gifted and Talented Students recommends that all Missouri public school districts, regardless of size, provide varied and multiple services to meet the needs of gifted and talented learners. **These services should be in addition to and complement a state approved gifted education program.** In the absence of such vital programs, multiple elements of the LoS model should still be utilized.

To best meet the needs of all gifted and talented students, the National Association for Gifted Children's (NAGC) Gifted Programming Standards recommend that a continuum of services must exist for gifted learners at every level. These levels of services provide administrators, teachers, parents, and students with a menu of educational options that are respectful of individual student differences and mindful of classroom and community resources while allowing for gifted and talented children to thrive in the least restrictive environment for their abilities. In 2017, the Council presented a report to the Missouri State Board of Education with three new recommendations, including:

Recommendation 13 The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) should develop a document providing guidance to districts on best practice for meeting the needs of the gifted and talented students. This document should incorporate key elements of Response to Intervention (RtI) for gifted students and a Levels of Services (LoS) approach that identifies a wide range of services to meet the varied and complex needs of gifted learners.

Too few gifted and talented students are appropriately challenged in Missouri schools. In general, students served in gifted programs outperform all other students in Missouri on MAP tests at all grade levels. The gap between gifted students and all Missouri students combined is significant in both English language arts and math. In grades five through eight, the gap grows even wider in math, with gifted students performing dramatically better than the population as a whole. With enhanced academic opportunities and guidance, these gifted students are likely to be leaders of innovation and economic growth. However, in the 2015-16 academic year, only 37.9% of Missouri districts had state approved gifted programs according to the DESE website historical data, and even these do not necessarily utilize RtI or LoS to provide appropriate levels of instruction to all gifted and talented students (DESE, n.d.). This leads to our highest ability students being unable to realize their full potential, greater levels of underachievement, and increased rates of dropping out of high school (Renzulli & Park, 2002). It also likely negatively impacts Missouri's economy. For example, accelerated individuals have average incomes 5% higher than non-accelerated ability peers (Warne, 2017).

Prominent interventions for meeting the needs of all students, including those who are gifted and talented, include Professional Learning Communities, Response to Intervention, and Levels of Services, all of which are addressed below.

Professional Learning Communities

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) see student learning, not teaching, as the mission. Policies, instruction, curriculum, programs, professional development, and all other functions of the school are aligned to support student learning. By maintaining this constant focus on learning, four questions become paramount:

1. What should students know and be able to do?
2. How will the school determine that students have learned the essential knowledge and skills?
3. How will the school respond when students do not learn?
4. How will the school respond when students already know?

Many schools implementing PLCs effectively address the first three guiding questions. This document answers the fourth and often overlooked question, how will schools respond when students already know the material? Missouri's PLC school-improvement model focuses on increasing student achievement by building the capacity of school personnel to create and sustain the conditions that promote high levels of student and adult learning. With a particular focus on answering question 4, PLCs may better address the unique needs of gifted learners.

Response to Intervention (RtI) Approach

Response to Intervention (RtI) is a school-wide initiative that allows the utilization of resources for students in need of academic, social or emotional assistance (see figure 1). The RtI model provides a system of interventions and resources which allow students to make significant progress whether they are at-risk for failure or are gifted and at-risk for not meeting their full potential (Colorado Department of Education, 2008). Based on the premise that all students deserve access to quality curriculum and instruction, RtI requires educators to provide additional time and attention to students based on their individual needs. These needs include underachievers with advanced potential and those who need additional acceleration, enrichment, or counseling services.

Gifted learners are a highly diverse population. They differ in their strengths and in their need of services. The RtI model can provide gifted and talented students additional time with teachers prepared to differentiate for their needs, including those who are multi-exceptional (NAGC, 2015). Multi-exceptional students may require services for both strengths and special needs. They should receive separate interventions for each area. It is common for environmental, cultural, and/or disabling conditions to sometimes mask a child's gifts and talents. Gifted learners should be provided access to a challenging and accelerated curriculum while also addressing the unique needs of their disability (Kentucky Department of Education, 2012).

The RtI model is to be used as a supplement, not as a replacement to a systematic program of services for students with high abilities. Teacher training regarding the differentiation of curriculum and instruction is essential in order to meet the needs of students with above-grade level abilities. Students who are gifted or talented are provided strength-based interventions to increase the potential for sufficient progress (Colorado Department of Education, 2008). Data collected on gifted and talented students requires evidence-based instruction, which differs from students in a general education classroom and require growth targets for advanced levels (Working on Gifted Issues Committee, 2011).

Figure 1
National Association for Gifted Children
Response to Intervention (RtI) approach to serving gifted students

What is RtI?	How Can RtI Include Gifted Students?
Response to Intervention (or Instruction) is usually a school-wide model	By holding the model accountable for the full range of students, the model includes appropriate educational experiences for gifted learners as well as for those students who may struggle in some way. Use a talent development vs. a deficit approach.
Method for identifying and serving students with additional academic and social emotional needs	RtI can be a method for early recognition of strengths and needs. "Additional academic and social-emotional needs" includes both interventions and alternate experiences, extensions, or acceleration. This includes meeting the needs of students who are gifted and those who are twice exceptional (e.g., are both gifted and have a disability such as SLD, ASD, ADHD).
Based on the premise that all students have access to a high quality core of instruction	High quality, grade-level core curriculum is inadequate for gifted learners. However, it is possible to supplement or replace the core with suitable acceleration, depth, and complexity in Tiers I, II, and III.
Includes universal screening and assessments	Assessments include those for achievement and ability. Assessments have adequate ceilings for the gifted and allow for demonstration of above-grade level performance.
Requires some students to have additional time and attention	Gifted students can have additional time with teachers with expertise in differentiation for gifted learners.
Includes progress monitoring and standard protocols for students who need additional supports and/or services	Progress monitoring is used to document mastery and need for compacted or replacement curriculum. Progress monitoring and interventions are used as a part of a decision making process for further services and for documenting student growth and performance.
Includes a team approach to problem solving that involves parents	A team approach is helpful for gifted students with diverse needs including underachievers with advanced potential, those who need additional acceleration or enrichment, or those needing counseling services.
Involves a tiered system of supports based on level of need	Gifted students differ in their strengths and in their need for intensity of services. Twice-exceptional students need services for both disability and high ability.

Levels of Services (LoS) Approach

In addition to state-approved gifted programs, other services shall be provided to expand educational opportunities based on student needs and interests. Gifted and talented students should receive education appropriate to their abilities at all times, not only when they attend a special class for gifted and talented students. The Levels of Services (LoS) approach meets the needs of more students, beginning with targeting all students based on strengths and interest, and with opportunities for advanced learners based on interest and skill (see figure 2).

The LoS approach recognizes that significant potential exists among many more students than have traditionally been identified and served in both academic content areas and many talent domains. In cooperation with parents and community members, districts should address these needs with opportunities that are appropriate, challenging, and differentiated.

The LoS approach

- is consistent with best practice;
- is best when utilized in addition to a state-approved gifted education program;
- supports appropriate and challenging instruction for high-ability students in many talent areas and academic disciplines;
- supports effective and appropriate differentiation for gifted and advanced learners; and
- complements and extends established state-approved gifted programs.

Level I: Services Provided for All Students

Opportunities that provide foundational skills and tools that help all students discover and build their personal strengths and talents:

- Character development
- Creative opportunities
- Fine arts enrichment programs
- Flexible grouping, including ability grouping, and cross-grade level grouping
- Project and Problem-Based Learning
- Summer and after-school enrichment opportunities

Level II: Services Needed by Many Students

Opportunities that invite students to engage in activities through which they can investigate their interests and verify areas in which they may demonstrate strengths:

- Academic competitions
- Athletic opportunities
- Cluster grouping
- Entrepreneurship opportunities
- Foreign language study

- Independent study
- Individualized instruction
- Internships and mentorships
- School plays and talent shows
- STEM/STEAM Schools
- Virtual learning opportunities

Level III: Services Needed by Some Students

Opportunities that involve alternative learning activities for students to engage in rigorous and complex learning based on documented needs in areas of strength and/or sustained interest:

- Advanced materials
- Curriculum compacting
- Fine arts talent development programs, such as by audition
- Gifted program classes
- Honors/advanced classes
- International Baccalaureate/Advanced Placement/Dual Credit/High School Honors
- Subject-level acceleration

Level IV: Services Needed by Few Students

Advanced opportunities that respond to the unique needs of individual students who have demonstrated outstanding ability, expertise, motivation, and passion to learn:

- Grade-level acceleration
- Missouri Scholars Academy/Missouri Fine Arts Academy/Governor’s School
- Magnet Schools such as PEGS (Program for Exceptionally Gifted Students) Programs, including, but not limited to, the following: PEGS in Center School District (SD), the St. Louis Regional PEGS in Pattonville SD and Lindbergh SD, PEGS at the Northland Innovation Center in North Kansas City SD, MOSAICS Academy in Parkway SD, and SCHOLARS in Springfield SD.

NAGC asserts that it is essential to provide educational opportunities at the appropriate level of challenge for advanced learners throughout the school day. NAGC recommends guiding principles of LoS program design, three of which are:

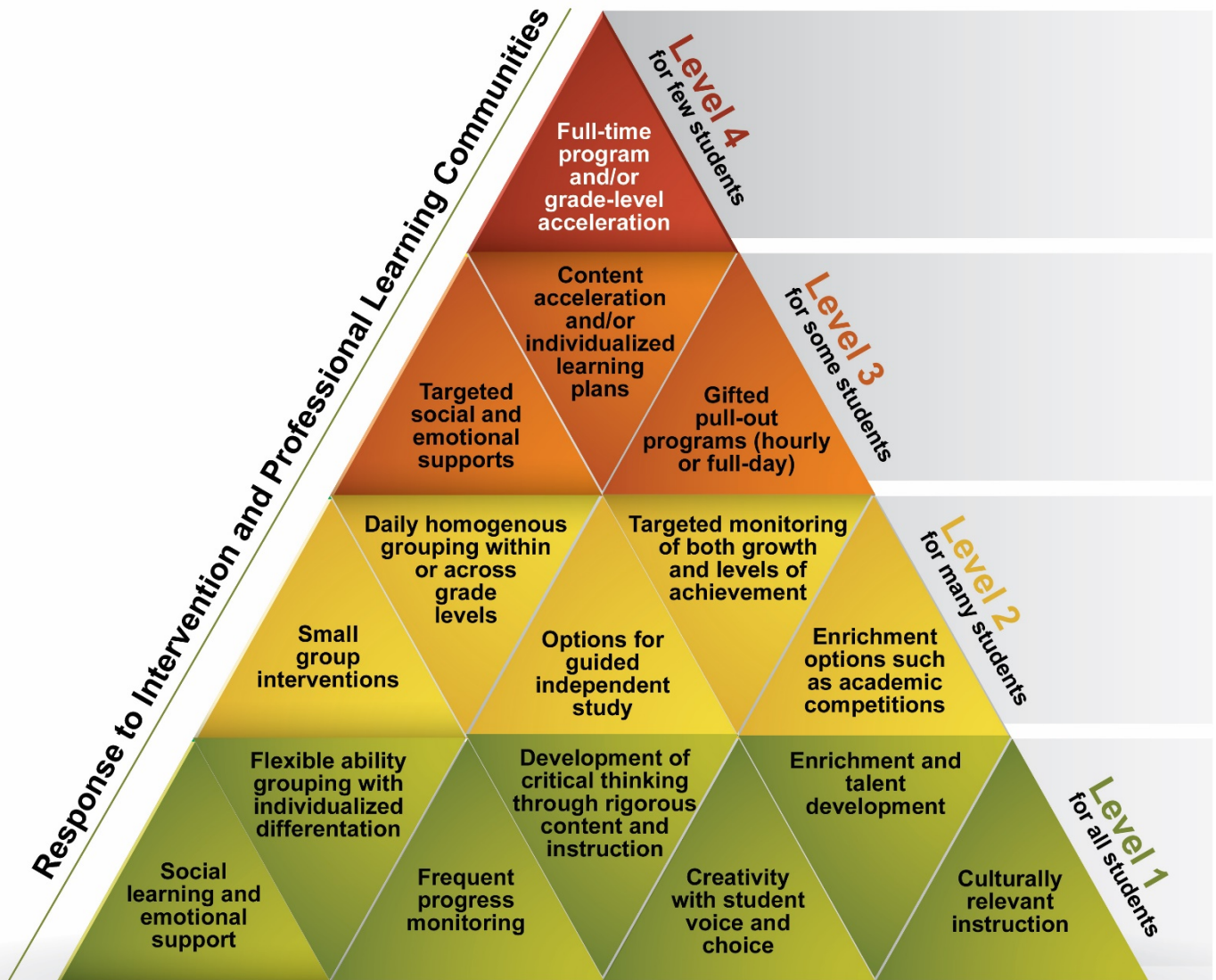
- Rather than any single gifted program, a continuum of programming services must exist for gifted learners.
- Gifted education programming services must be an integral part of the general education school day.
- Flexible groupings of students must be developed to facilitate differentiated instruction and curriculum.

An LoS approach provides a variety of programming and learning options that are collaboratively developed and implemented and that enhance student performance in cognitive and affective areas. In school districts that offer an LoS approach to meet the needs of gifted and talented students, all educators regularly use:

- Multiple alternative approaches to accelerate learning.
- Enrichment options to extend and deepen learning opportunities within and outside of the school setting.
- Multiple forms of grouping, including clusters, resource rooms, special classes, or special schools.
- Individualized learning options such as mentorships, internships, online courses, and independent studies.
- Current technologies, including online learning options and assistive technologies to enhance access to high-level programming.

Administrators demonstrate support for gifted programs through equitable allocation of resources and demonstrated willingness to ensure that learners with gifts and talents receive appropriate educational services.

Levels of Gifted Educational Services Within an RtI Framework



**Students identified for an RtI level are entitled to the services of that level as well as all services at lower levels.*

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