

From the President ...

The TAG Board is looking forward to the CEC 2009 Convention and Expo at the Washington State Convention and Trade Center, April 1–4, in Seattle! Cheryll Adams, Sneha Shah-Coltrane, and Mary Ruth Coleman have planned a special preconference session at CEC's annual conference entitled "Evidence-Based Practices for Culturally Responsive Gifted Education." During the morning, panelists will present evidence-based practices in each of the following areas: identification (Susan Johnsen), programming (Diane Montgomery), curriculum (Cheryll Adams), social/emotional (Tracy Cross), families (Gloria Taradash), and policy (Mary Rizza). Following the panel presentation, participants may choose a roundtable, led by the each of the panelists, and discuss one of the topics more in-depth. During the afternoon, participants will learn about an effective model, U-STARS~PLUS (Using Science, Talents, and Abilities to Recognize Students ~ Promoting Learning for Under-represented Students), which focuses on helping primary school teachers nurture, recognize, and respond to the needs of children who show indications of outstanding potential. The five components of the U-STARS~PLUS approach include creating a high-end learning environment; systematically observing children's potential; developing hands-on/inquiry-based science activities; engaging the family; and building capacity within the system. Mary Ruth Coleman and Sneha Shah-Coltrane will show how these components are implemented in the classroom, school, and district settings and will examine the research findings related to the project.

This preconference is built on a larger CEC initiative that focuses on determining criteria for an evidence-based practice, which "is a strategy or intervention designed for use by special educators and intended to support the education of individuals with exceptional learning needs" (Council for Exceptional Children. [2008]. *State of evidence for special education professional practices: Practice study manual*. Washington, DC: Author; p. 6). Each CEC Division has an opportunity to sponsor particular practices that they would like to examine in greater depth to determine their evidence base. CEC's Research Division has already made recommendations for criteria to examine studies using methods that incorporate correlational, single subject, qualitative, group experimental and quasi-experimental, and research designs. (For information regarding these criteria, visit CEC's Web site at <http://www.cec.sped.org> and click on the "Evidence-based Practice" link.) After determining which practices meet these standards, CEC wants to disseminate them in a way that is accessible for teachers to use in their classrooms. The Association for the Gifted is in the process of identifying specific evidence-based practices that it would like to submit for further study. We would be interested in your thoughts regarding which practices should be submitted.

In collaboration with the National Association for Gifted Children, members of the TAG Board continue to be involved in standards work, which includes *program standards* for K–12 professionals, *core standards* for K–12 teachers, and *advanced standards*. Along with other topics, all of these projects will be discussed at its annual business meeting, which will be held from 5:30–6:30 p.m. on Thursday, April 2 in the Jefferson Room followed by the TAG Social in the Willow A Room. Both meetings are at the Sheraton Seattle. Please plan on attending both of these meetings and become involved in TAG!

Susan Johnsen, President
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Position Paper on Growth Model Pilot Program

Council of Exceptional Children-The Association for the Gifted (CEC-TAG)

Introduction

The reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, No Child Left Behind (NCLB) mandates that states establish accountability plans, which detail how and when schools will achieve full proficiency toward academic content standards. In 2005, Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings announced the federal growth model pilot program as an alternative method that states can use to determine if schools are meeting this goal. Prior to the growth model pilot program, states' accountability plans used a status model, which relies on a single year's assessment as an indicator of how many students are achieving proficiency in the academic content standards. Growth models, on the other hand, are developed to track individual student performance over time.

Position Statement

The Association for the Gifted believes that growth models should be used in accountability plans instead of status models so that all students' progress can be measured. Further, CEC-TAG believes that assessment is necessary to improve instruction and that assessment results can and should assist educators and policy-makers to identify which schools are most in need of assistance to reduce achievement gaps. Certainly schools should examine subgroup differences to determine if students are receiving opportunities to learn regardless of their socioeconomic status, gender, race or ethnicity, or English language status. This position paper pertains to the subgroup of students who are identified as gifted and the failure of the existing conceptualization of the growth model pilot program to take their educational needs into account.

Background

The development of the growth model pilot program was heralded by educators and policy-makers as a means by which the academic achievement growth of students who are gifted could be measured. The pilot programs have not lived up to this promise. The current structure of the growth model pilot programs expands the ability of a state to count students as proficient in determining AYP if they are *on target* toward proficiency. In this way, more attention and resources are focused on students who are not performing at proficiency, but who may have potential to

test at the proficient level in some future grade. Current growth models can be classified into three broad categories: identifying annual growth targets (amount of score increase from one year to the next) for students; predicting students' future score based on their prior achievement scores; and establishing a set of values that correspond to each level of the state test, and comparing the average value for a school to the tabled values.

Issues

Several issues with growth models have been identified by the Council for Exceptional Children-The Association for the Gifted as affecting the subgroup of gifted and talented students. These include:

1. States use growth models for schools only if they fail to meet AYP using status models or safe harbor so that they can count students who are *on target* toward proficient. This narrow definition of growth means that resources are focused on students who are close to reaching proficient and not to students who are above proficient.
2. Current state achievement tests do not have enough difficult items to adequately measure gifted student growth, thus growth models cannot be a means to determine gifted students' progress using these existing measures.
3. Current growth models compare students' prior achievement to a minimum standard. This leads to teaching to the test with a focus on students below the proficient level on the state achievement test. In addition, with the current emphasis on reading and mathematics, other subject areas do not receive the instructional emphasis that they should.
4. Some current growth model systems establish multiple performance cut points below the proficiency level and local educational agencies are given credit for moving a student from one level of proficiency to another. For example, some growth models count a student as *on track* toward proficiency if the student moves from a performance level such as "far below proficiency" during year 1 to a higher performance level such as "below proficiency" during year 2.

Recommendations

Therefore, CEC-TAG recommends that growth model systems consider gifted and

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talented students by including these characteristics:

- Growth models need to reflect growth beyond proficiency. Defining growth as beyond “proficiency” takes into account students who score higher than a minimal level of proficient.
- State achievement tests should be able to measure beyond minimum skills. In order for accountability plans to be useful to improve instruction for students who are gifted, growth must be measurable. In some situations, schools will need to measure above-grade-level achievement in order to document student growth.
- Models need to expand their focus

to take into consideration teacher and program effects on *all* students’ performance and determine how best to instruct students who are gifted in a variety of domains.

- The term *growth model* should be clearly defined as measurement of academic success on the basis of how much student achievement improves and should be based on individual student gains. Growth in student achievement needs to be based on individual student gains, which are both above and below proficiency, so that gifted and talented students gains can be tracked.

Summary

CEC-TAG is committed to an as-

essment system that measures individual growth beyond proficiency levels. This growth model system would not only enhance the opportunities for more students to learn beyond minimum levels but also focus needed resources in the design of assessments that show above-level performance.

Reference

U.S. Department of Education. (2001). *Elementary and Secondary Education Act Subpart 4—State Accountability for Adequate Yearly Progress*. Retrieved September 3, 2008, from <http://www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/pg92.html>

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Save the Date!

CEC Preconvention Workshop

Evidence-Based Practices for Culturally Responsive Gifted Education
Wednesday, April 1, 2009
Seattle, WA

The continued underrepresentation and underservice of children from culturally/linguistically diverse and economically disadvantaged families is a critical issue for the field of gifted education. This session will examine culturally responsive

evidence-based practices around identification, programming, curriculum, social/emotional needs, families, and policies for gifted education.

Presenters include Mary Ruth Coleman, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Susan Johnsen, Baylor University; Diane Montgomery, Oklahoma State University; Cheryll Adams, Ball State University; Tracy Cross, Ball State University; Gloria Taradash, Initiatives for Education; and Sneha Shah-Coltrane, North Carolina Department of Public Instruction.

To register, please visit <http://www.cec.sped.org>. Take advantage of the discounted rate by registering before March 9!

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The Association for the Gifted

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The TAG newsletter is a quarterly publication. If you have news or upcoming events you’d like to share with other TAG members or have a brief article you’d like to have featured in the newsletter, please contact Jennifer Robins at jenniferrobins@mac.com.