



Pennsylvania Department of Education Gifted Guidelines at a Glance

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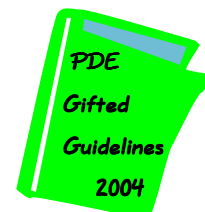
Purpose of the PDE Gifted Guidelines

In general, guidelines explain the way an executive agency will interpret its regulations and provide the local agency (here, the school districts) with an acceptable standard and recommended practice. These Guidelines will be used as the rationale by hearing officers, the state appeals panels, and courts “to flesh out the bare bones” of the regulations. As they become part of the fabric of decisions and opinions, they will become part of the common law that sets minimum requirements. Your copy of these Guidelines should be dog-eared, heavily underlined, and annotated. They should be heavily utilized in conversations with the district and to frame requests at IEP meetings. For the reasons stated above, a District should be challenged if its only response to noncompliance with recommended practices in the guidelines is, “they are not mandates.” The only appropriate response is a reasoned explanation of why, in the context of a particular student’s IEP, the recommendation in the Guidelines is inapplicable.

This Bulletin reminds educators and parents about the key data included in the Guidelines, and is meant as a starting point for further examination and use of the document itself.

Key Guiding Principles of the Guidelines

- ▶ The local school district is primarily responsible for identifying all exceptional children and developing educational programs to meet their needs. (24 P.S. §13-1371).
- ▶ Pennsylvania School Law includes gifted students as “children with exceptionalities” who need specially designed instruction.
- ▶ Appropriate specially designed instruction should be based on the gifted student’s needs and abilities. (22 Pa. Code §16.41(b)(1))
- ▶ The Gifted Individualized Educational Program (GIEP) should be based on information obtained from formal and informal comprehensive needs assessments, including input from parents. (22 Pa. Code §16.22 and §16.32)
- ▶ The placement of a gifted student should ensure that the student is able to benefit meaningfully from the rate, level and manner of instruction. (22 Pa. Code §16.41)
- ▶ The placement of a gifted student should provide learning opportunities that go beyond the program the student would receive as part of regular education. (22 Pa. Code §16.41)
- ▶ Gifted education programming must be an integral part of the instructional school day.
- ▶ Gifted students benefit from being grouped with their intellectual peers for a significant part of their instructional day.



What Do the Guidelines Say About...*Defining and Identifying the Gifted Student?*

**No
One
Test
Is
Sufficient**

- Intellectual ability is not equated with an IQ score alone. Intellectual ability is and should be a reflection of a range of assessments, including a student's performance and potential.
- No one test is sufficient to determine giftedness. The evaluation and testing literature recognize that there is a margin of error in any standardized testing.
- The assessment instruments should have high enough ceilings to accurately reflect academic performance in the gifted range.
- Assessment data should show not only what the student knows, but also describe where is the need for specially designed instruction and content.
- Assessment data must include the speed at which the student is able to acquire, understand, and demonstrate competency of new learning. This Rate of Acquisition and Retention information is used to adjust the pace of learning for the gifted.
- Districts should also use identification criteria that assess the student's demonstrated achievement, performance, and expertise in one or more academic areas.
- Some students' gifted abilities are masked by such factors as gender or race bias, socio-economic status or physical or emotional disabilities. Specific data about these intervening factors should be collected and used to determine the need for specially designed instruction.

What Do the Guidelines Say About...*What Gifted Students Need to Learn?*

**Not
More
of
the
Same**

Specifically, Chapter 16 requires districts to provide gifted students with specially designed instruction (§16.41(b)). This requirement tells schools that they must make modifications or adaptations for the gifted in their:

- General curriculum
- Instructional and teaching strategies
- Classroom setting and environment
- Materials and Resources used for instruction

The Guidelines offer a clear warning to both educators and parents that difficulties arise when only a single option or one-size-fits-all program is offered to gifted students.

The Guidelines tell schools to avoid:

- Offering more of the same level of material or the same kind of problem.
- Providing either enrichment or acceleration alone.
- Teaching higher thinking skills in isolation from academic content.
- Presenting additional work that is simply different from the core curriculum but not differentiated specifically for the gifted learner.
- Grouping with intellectual peers without differentiating content and instruction.
- Providing only grade-level content.
- Overlooking curricular gaps between elementary and secondary placements (p. 28).

What Do the Guidelines Say About...*Gifted Programming Options?*

The Gifted Guidelines emphatically point out that one-size programs do not fit all gifted students. Programs and GIEPs must include individualization through acceleration and enrichment. Listed below are suggested program options:

- Cluster Grouping based on instructional level
- Open-ended compacted curriculum with flexible pacing
- Grade or subject acceleration (cross grade grouping)
- Credit by examination
- Grade or subject skipping
- College courses taken in high school
- Advanced placement or honors courses with earlier-than normal access (adaptation of pace or depth may be needed to be considered 'specially designed' for a gifted student. AP is not enough for some learners.)
- Independent study designed to meet a gifted student's long-term interests and expertise in a given area.
- Early entrance to kindergartens
- Specialized curriculum for gifted based on validated research
- Alternative scheduling (block, alternating days, etc.)
- On-line courses and distance learning
- Mentorship, apprenticeship, internships and field experiences designed to meet students' performance level and career interests.
- Consortium, collaborative or cooperative arrangements with other school districts
- Out of school educational experiences (trips, workshops)
- Full-time classroom for students with high ability
- Magnet school
- Independent learning contracts
- Early graduation
- Extracurricular activities such as Odyssey of the Mind, Future Problem Solving, Mock Trial, etc. (these should not be the only programs provided).

Lack of availability of placement alternatives, lack of qualified staff, lack of space, or administrative convenience should NOT be the basis of choosing programming options for gifted students.

One Size Does Not Fit All

What do the Guidelines say about...Grouping?

Gifted students need to be grouped with their intellectual peers for a significant part of their instructional day. Meaningful instruction occurs when gifted students are grouped together according to academic ability, performance characteristics, or when they have advance knowledge of content. The Gifted Guidelines glossary notes the following grouping arrangements and defines their benefits to the gifted.

Ability Grouping

Arranging students by ability to meet various instructional purposes. These groups are specific to the educational goals to be achieved and can be flexibly formed and reformed as needed. Ability grouping is NOT synonymous with "tracking."

Cluster Grouping

The practice of identifying the top five to eight gifted students at a grade level and placing them in the same classroom with a teacher best suited and qualified to work with them.

Flexible Grouping

Arranging students by interest or need. Movement among groups is common, based on readiness of a given skill or demonstration of academic mastery.

Homogeneous Grouping

Placing and grouping students together according to similar abilities, interests, and special academic needs. These groupings can occur across grade levels, within specific interest areas, and for extended or limited periods of time.

What do the Guidelines say about...Curriculum and Instruction?

Chapter 16 Gifted Education Guidelines note that providing gifted students with specially designed instruction and challenging curriculum modification is the responsibility of all teachers, not just that of the gifted support teachers.

The Guidelines describe the very best practices and principles to use with gifted students. They address what the student learns (*Content*); how they should learn (*Instruction*); what levels they should reach for (*Product*); and the resources and space they need to meet high expectations (*Learning Environment*).

For more information and examples of specially designed curriculum and instruction that describe what **content, process, product, and learning environment** for the gifted should look like, refer to pp. 29-31 of the Gifted Guidelines.



Some school districts run into difficulties when they don't acknowledge a wide range of differences among their gifted learners. The Guidelines note this problem occurs when districts simply:

- Offer more of the same level of material,
- Provide either enrichment or acceleration alone,
- Present additional work that is simply different from the core curriculum but not differentiated specifically for the gifted learner,
- Grouping with intellectual peers without differentiating content and instruction,
- Providing only grade-level content,
- Districts should be aware that the use of extra work, peer tutoring, or helping the teacher does not constitute specially designed instruction or gifted education, and Advanced Placement or Honors courses are not in themselves gifted education if they do not respond to the gifted student's individual needs.

Yes

No

Guiding Questions for Gifted Instruction

- | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Are specially designed instruction and learning modifications available, K-12? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Do programming options include early entrance to kindergarten, grade or subject skipping, early-to-college and early graduation? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Does the program, curricula, and specially designed instruction address individual needs of students? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Are the social-emotional needs of a gifted child being addressed? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Does the school district make adaptations for each gifted student that provide for both acceleration and enrichment, as the GIEP requires? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Does the district offer a range of advanced, honors and AP courses? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Is the programming for gifted coordinated and integrated with the regular education program? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Are gifted students provided with career guidance services? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Are underachieving gifted students provided with special services and support? |



Guiding Checklists

Within the Guidelines are a series of checklists to assist you in evaluating and assessing a student's IEP, the processes of arriving at the IEP, the District's gifted programming and compliance with the District's duties under gifted law. What follows is an annotated list of those checklists.

*How Does
Your School
Measure
Up?*

Screening

On page 10, there is a list of the documentation or instruments available to identify giftedness.

Timelines

On page 24, there is a list of the timelines for GMDE, GWR, Invitation to GIEP meeting, NORA, and GIEP.

Programming Options

Programming options for gifted students as an enumerated list of settings and selections appear on page 26.

Parental Responsibilities

On pages 36-37, a listing of ways to prepare to advocate for your child are presented.

Parental Responsibilities

There is a listing of job responsibilities in gifted education for administrators, regular classroom teachers, counselors and school psychologists, and full-time gifted teachers on pages 33-36.

Assessment of Program

A series of subtopics are presented along with a checklist for each to evaluate compliance or to monitor accountability. The subtopics are program plan and professional development; screening and identification; GIEP; procedural issues; educational placement and program delivery.

Rates of Acquisition and Retention

The Chuska Scales to measure high and low rates of acquisition and for determining high and low rates or degrees of retention are part of Chapter 7 on pages 46 and 47.

The Guidelines....A Place To Turn for Additional Resources!

Chapter 7 is a wealth of supplemental information. It includes a list of commonly used acronyms; a glossary of educational terms to help parents overcome the educational jargon and to speak the education lingo; and annotated decisions of the State Appeals Panels and the federal and state courts. The Guidelines have a valuable list of Web sites beginning on page 43. Missing from the list is the address of the Office of Dispute Resolution, www.pattan.k12.pa.us/ODR, which publishes all the Special Education Appeals Panel decisions annotated in the section of Chapter 7 entitled "Legal Review." To read the entire decisions of the Pennsylvania Supreme and Commonwealth Courts, the courts having statewide jurisdiction, you can go to the following Web site, <http://www.aopc.org>.

In interpreting the annotated cases that precede the adoption of Chapter 16, you should be aware of the purpose statement when it published Chapter 16:

"The separation of gifted education from Chapters 14 and 342 does not alter statutory protections for gifted education, nor creates a need to relitigate established case law in this Commonwealth as it pertains to students who are gifted."



In addition, throughout the body of the Guidelines are references to PDE addresses that have model or annotated forms for the following: Gifted Written Report (p. 15); Permission to Evaluate; Permission of Intent to Re-evaluate; Invitation to GIEP Meeting; Notice of Recommended Assignment; Notice of Parental Rights; Gifted IEP (p. 16, 18, 21).

This section of the Guidelines, pp. 41-53, contains the following:

1. A listing of gifted education and legal acronyms spelled out.
2. A comprehensive glossary to help both educators and parents understand gifted education and legal terms.
3. A listing of over fifty commercial and professional sources for gifted education materials and information. Phone numbers, mail addresses, and Web site data are included.
4. A copy of the **Chuska Scales for Determining Date of Acquisition** and for **Determining Rate of Retention**. This is one of the key multiple criteria assessment scales districts may use when screening and identifying students as gifted. Parents and school districts have permission to copy these scales.
5. A legal review section, pp. 48-51, that includes excerpts from several, recent State Court and Appeals Panel decisions. These decisions and opinions have established case law precedent and protection for gifted students in Pennsylvania.

Other Gifted Education Centers' Web sites are listed below:

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. .Basic Education Circular (BEC):
Special Education for Gifted Students
www.pde.state.pa.us/k12/cwp/view.asp?A=11&Q+914232. Carnegie Mellon Institute for Talented Elementary Students (C-MITES)
www.cmu.edu/cmities/3. EPGY (Education Program for Gifted Youth)
Stanford University
www-epgy.Stanford.edu4. Hoagies' Gifted Education Page
www.hoagiesgifted.org5. Johns Hopkins University
www.jhu.edu/gifted | <ol style="list-style-type: none">6. National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC)
www.nagc.org7. National Research Center on the Gifted & Talented
University of Connecticut
www.gifteduconn.edu8. Parent's Guide to Special Education for the Gifted
www.pde.state.pa.us/gifted_ed/cwp/view.asp?a=73160&gifted_edNav= 5357 &gifted_edNav= 9. Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE)
www.pde.state.pa.us/gifted_ed10. Pennsylvania Association for Gifted Education (PAGE)
www.penngifted.org11. SENG (Supporting Emotional Needs of the Gifted)
http://www.sengifted.org/ |
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