Meeting the Needs of Advanced Learners

GUIDANCE FOR SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS

**Northwestern University
Center for Talent Development**

in partnership with ECRA Group

About the Center for Talent Development

For over 35 years, the Center for Talent Development (CTD) at Northwestern University has helped young people set ambitious learning goals and realize the full potential of their talents by providing access to appropriate assessments and systematic and continuous enrichment and accelerated programs in a variety of domains, starting in early childhood and continuing through adolescence. CTD recognizes that talent is developed by matching an individual's interests and aptitude with the right blend of opportunities, experiences, and challenges, coupled with motivation, perseverance, study, and practice.

CTD also works in collaboration with schools and families, providing them with the expertise and resources needed to support talent development using best practices.

Consult with the Center for Talent Development

CTD provides direct services for students, professional learning for educators and administrators, program evaluation and policy development to improve programs and services, and assessments that help identify advanced students' strengths and monitor their growth. For school districts in need of deeper support services related to operationalizing gifted and talented policies at the student level, our partnership with ECRA Group offers additional resources.

ECRA Group is a translational research and analytics firm focused on helping educational leaders improve student outcomes by adopting more evidence-based practices. The CTD and ECRA partnership offers local school districts tools to implement policies related to the identification and monitoring of advanced learners. ECRA Group has partnered with over 1,000 school systems nationally and works in partnership with many state and national professional organizations such as the American Association of School Administrators (AASA). For more information regarding how ECRA Group can provide support, please visit www.ecragroup.com/ctd.

" Schools can make important instructional decisions to meet the needs of all learners and ensure equitable access to a robust, high quality education. "

Introduction

In the talent development framework, the concept of giftedness is not static, but developmental. Ability evolves over time with opportunity, challenge, motivation, and practice. If ability is malleable, then identification of talent and the process of developing talent into productive achievement should begin early and be ongoing. Just as there are ongoing, universal screening procedures for Response to Intervention (RtI) / Multi-Tier System of Supports (MTSS), there should be similar procedures to identify students that have advanced learning needs beyond the regular curriculum. By gathering the appropriate performance data, monitoring learning rates and growth, and assessing psychosocial skill development, schools can make important instructional decisions to meet the needs of all learners and ensure equitable access to a robust, high quality education.

There are several best practices to consider when identifying advanced learning needs in students, developing programs to offer more challenge than the regular curriculum provides, and evaluating the efficacy of the implemented programs and services.

The information in this document provides best practices in the following areas based on a talent development approach:

- › Goals for Student Learning
- › Screening / Needs Identification
- › Student Placement
- › Program Development
- › Implementation and Evaluation

Goals for Student Learning

ESTABLISH CLEAR DEFINITIONS AND GOALS

Take time to define the population of students to be served through advanced academic programs and services and the goals for student learning. Make sure the goals for advanced learners align with overall school or district goals for all learners.

PROVIDE TRANSPARENCY

Be clear about what needs each advanced program is designed to address, the scope of services offered, and the process used to place students in the services available. Post information, including policies and procedures, where stakeholders can access it.

PITFALLS TO AVOID

Do not assume that all stakeholders understand the terms "advanced" or "gifted" or that they agree about approaches to meeting the learning needs of these students.

Screening / Needs Identification

View identification as the process of finding all students with advanced learning needs. Focus efforts on finding students who demonstrate readiness for advanced learning in particular subjects or domains, rather than on holistic characterization of students as gifted. Screening should aim to identify 20% to 30% of students across the school or district for further assessment and potential placement in the appropriate type of programming (e.g., enrichment, acceleration).

SCREEN EARLY AND OFTEN

Implement universal screening of students whenever possible, and repeat screening procedures periodically to capture students whose potential and ability emerges later. Make sure there are opportunities to identify potential or high achievement beyond the formal screening process for students whose talents emerge later or in different ways.

SELECT APPROPRIATE SCREENING TOOLS AND NORMS

Regularly review assessment tools and identification criteria to ensure that they are equitable to all groups of students. Understand the uses and limitations of each assessment tool.

Assessment tools should align with the goals and content of each service or intervention being considered. For example, use assessments of mathematical reasoning ability for placement in advanced math classes or assessments of verbal reasoning ability for advanced language arts programs.

Be thoughtful and deliberate about the norms used for needs identification and placement in accelerated services. For example, local norms, as opposed to national norms, identify students who could most likely benefit from additional advanced intervention based on a given school or district's curriculum and programming. State or national norms, particularly that compare high achieving students to each other, may be relevant for benchmarking performance and evaluating services.

Ensure teachers have had training in identifying the characteristics of advanced learners, particularly under-identified populations of learners, before including them in a referral or screening process.

PROVIDE TESTING ACCOMMODATIONS AND SUPPORTS

Provide appropriate accommodations for students during screening.

Ensure that accommodations or supports follow students with disabilities or students receiving English language services into advanced programs and accelerated settings.

PITFALLS TO AVOID

Never rely exclusively on referral/nomination to initiate assessment for identification or placement in accelerated settings.

Do not remove students from a program based on new screening unless the student is not successful in the current programming or the program is substantially changing (e.g., moving from enrichment to acceleration).

Student Placement

Following broad-based screening and needs identification, determining appropriate placement should incorporate additional data beyond the screening process. Ideally, placement should be based on a comprehensive learner profile that includes other indicators related to success in the program, such as interests and previous achievement.

PITFALLS TO AVOID

Avoid making identification criteria more selective than necessary to predict success in a given program. Use multiple qualifying criteria for placement in services only if each criterion is substantially related to success in the program.

Do not select students for a pre-determined number of spots in a single program. Instead, aim to meet all learners' needs.

Do not combine scores across various instruments by using a matrix unless all criteria are comparable and relevant to program success.

Program Development

Develop a systematic and continuous program that provides a range of services within a grade level (horizontal continuum) and at all grade levels (vertical continuum).

DESIGN CURRICULUM

Curriculum should be designed to meet the academic needs and learning goals of advanced learners that cannot be met in the regular classroom.

The goals for advanced programs should be clear and connected to the larger vision for students in the school or district.

ESTABLISH POLICIES

Ensure policies are in place to address critical issues, including accelerated placements, identification for services, and exiting services.

DIFFERENTIATE PROGRAMS

Anticipate the need to have programming for gifted learners in key subjects but also different program models for students at different levels of development (e.g., enrichment for some students, accelerated programs for other students).

VARY INSTRUCTIONAL MODELS

Use a variety of grouping and instructional models to meet the needs of diverse learners in need of advanced curriculum.

PITFALLS TO AVOID

Programs for advanced learners should not be used to provide activities or curriculum that would be good for all students (e.g., field trips, creative thinking strategies).

The content of advanced programs should not be completely separate from content taught in the core curriculum. Programming for advanced learners should provide the content in greater depth or complexity or offer access to higher-grade-level content at an earlier age.

Implementation and Evaluation

IMPLEMENT EARLY AND CONTINUOUSLY

Implement advanced programming as early as possible and provide programs and services at all grade levels.

Offer challenging critical and creative thinking experiences for all students, particularly in early grades, to help them demonstrate their potential for advanced learning and readiness for differentiated instruction. Early enrichment promotes equity and access by giving students who may have had limited exposure to school-like experiences the chance to demonstrate what they know, understand, and can do.

EVALUATE OFTEN

Periodically assess students' progress to ensure they are continuing to advance at a pace commensurate with their ability and are not regressing.

EVALUATE APPROPRIATELY

Evaluate services/interventions using metrics aligned with the service goals (e.g., growth in verbal reasoning for advanced English language arts class).

Employ the use of criterion measures aligned to programs and normative comparison measures for greater context.
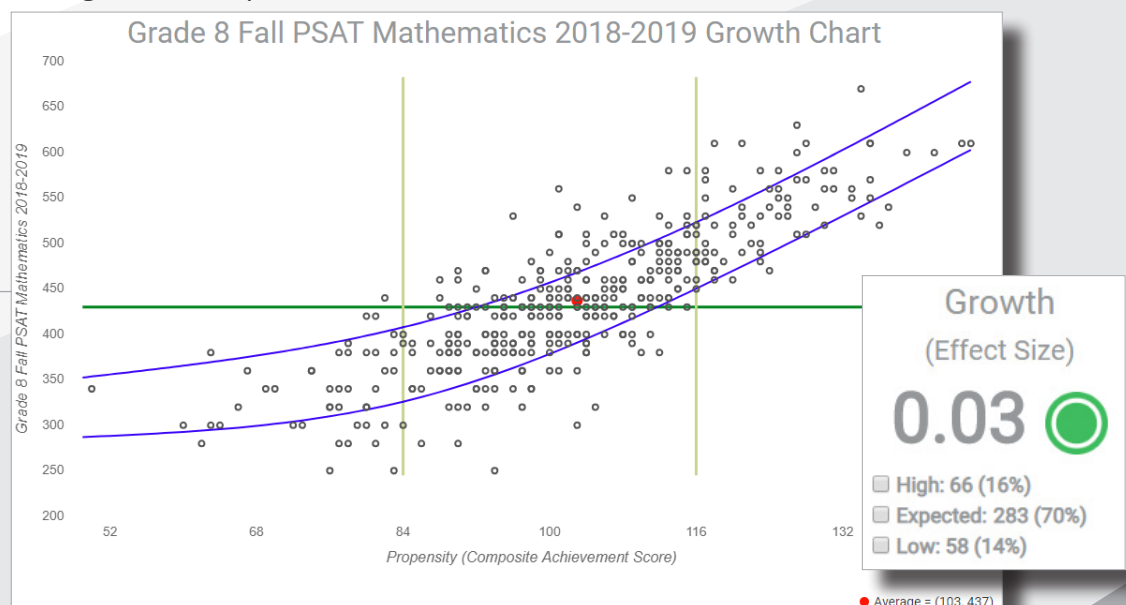
PITFALLS TO AVOID

Do not rely on satisfaction ratings and subjective measures to evaluate programs and services.
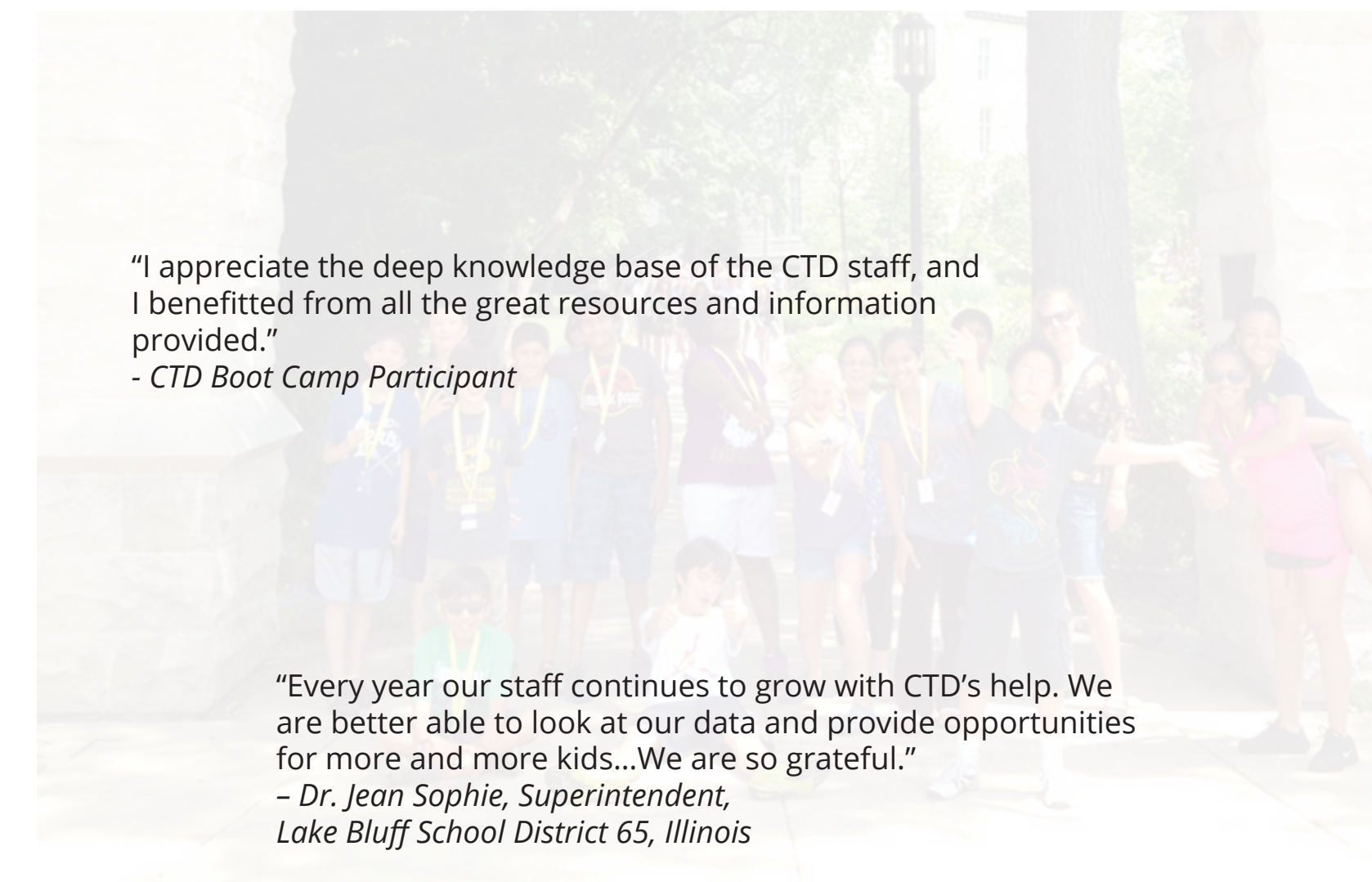
MONITOR GROWTH

Monitor advanced students' growth over time using assessments with a high enough ceiling to measure above-grade-level growth and performance.

Identify quantitative and qualitative data points that align with other program evaluations and can demonstrate growth.

Grade 8 Fall PSAT Mathematics 2018-2019 Growth Chart

y-axis: Grade 8 Fall PSAT Mathematics 2018-2019 (200, 250, 300, 350, 400, 450, 500, 550, 600, 650, 700)

x-axis: Propensity (Composite Achievement Score) (52, 68, 84, 100, 116, 132)

Growth (Effect Size)

0.03

High: 66 (16%)
Expected: 283 (70%)
Low: 58 (14%)

● Average = (103, 437)

"I appreciate the deep knowledge base of the CTD staff, and I benefitted from all the great resources and information provided."
- *CTD Boot Camp Participant*

"Every year our staff continues to grow with CTD's help. We are better able to look at our data and provide opportunities for more and more kids...We are so grateful."
– Dr. Jean Sophie, Superintendent,
Lake Bluff School District 65, Illinois

"Our time with CTD was great for me as a person new to a gifted school. I was glad to have colleagues with me as we were able to plan, discuss, and share ideas throughout the sessions. The presenters were knowledgeable and helpful."
– Professional Learning Attendee

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www.ctd.northwestern.edu

**CONTACT THE CENTER FOR TALENT DEVELOPMENT
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