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Department: From Where I Sit



Putting Our Stake in the Ground

Paula Olszewski-Kubilius, NAGC President

While NAGC's main purpose is and always will be advocacy for gifted children, appropriate educational programs, services, and policies for gifted and talented children cannot be built upon a weak base of general education. Ultimately, NAGC will be more effective in its advocacy for gifted children if it has some influence in shaping general education policies and practices. We have a better chance of ensuring that gifted programs persist despite the vagaries of budgets and local finances if they are rightly seen as contributing to the overall quality of education in this country and as offering viable solutions to major educational problems that schools and districts face.

I spent the last year investigating gifted programs across the country that successfully meet the needs of a wide range of gifted students including the highly gifted, low income gifted children, and culturally and linguistically diverse gifted students. I found a number of exemplary programs including the Academically Talented Youth Program in Michigan, the DaVinci School in Hall County, Georgia, Project Excite at Northwestern University, the Mentor Connection program at the University of Connecticut, the Young Scholars Program in Fairfax County schools in Virginia, and the SETSWAS program in District 46 in Elgin, Illinois. These programs offer innovative approaches to identification and program design, primarily focused on developing the talents of students who have traditionally been under-identified and under-served by gifted programs. Many more wonderful programs exist out there and these are just a sampling.

At the end of my year of research, I had a renewed sense of how much the field of gifted education has to offer general education. We have practices that increase student engagement and motivation,

program designs that close achievement gaps, and school designs that prepare students with 21st century skills. We have always been leaders and innovators in the use of new technologies for learning, individualization and personalization of learning, distance education, problem-based learning — all major topics within current national discussions about education and school reform.

There is value in NAGC putting its stake in the ground about important national education issues. Stating our positions can help us build bridges to other organizations that share our concerns and our priorities. Recognizing such mutual priorities can result in cooperative efforts between organizations and partnerships, such as the one we share with CEC, that significantly amplify our advocacy voice.

Recently, I enlisted a group of leaders in our field to guide me and the NAGC board of directors in identifying four current national education issues on which are most important for NAGC to take a position:

The Common Core State Standards

While most agree that these are higher level than current state standards, they should be viewed as providing important pathways for greater differentiation in task demands for gifted learners. At the same time, we need to stress that they are not sufficient for the gifted learner and educators will need to know how to translate them into sufficiently challenging activities and facilitate gifted children meeting them at accelerated rates.

Assessment of Learning

Accountability paradigms need to include growth models that are responsive to all learners, including gifted learners. All school districts should assess individual student growth in core content areas and report aggregated and disaggregated data (i.e., for gifted students) annually. The content and scaling of assessment instruments needs to be able to evaluate and measure above grade level learning and achievement.

Achievement and Excellence Gaps

We must close opportunity gaps for low income and culturally and linguistically diverse gifted students with increased emphasis on broad approaches to the identification and support of these students. Specifically, we should emphasize equity and access to enrichment and advanced learning opportunities as early as possible, in preschool and the early elementary school, particularly in literacy and STEM areas.

Teacher Preparation and Accountability

The definition of a "high quality" educator must include competence in gifted education methods and talent development including providing challenging and above grade-level content and instruction that results in appropriate levels of yearly growth for gifted students. It must also include cultural competency, including identifying and supporting diverse gifted students, and providing a truly multi-cultural curriculum to all students.

Over the next year, the NAGC Governance Committee, with the support of the Association Editor and the Publications Committee, will develop position papers for the organization on these four issues. They

will be developed in accordance with existing NAGC policies and procedures for position statements. They will ultimately be posted on the NAGC website, serving another important resource for advocates of services and programs for high-ability learners as we continue to make our case and contribute to the broader education dialogue.