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## Department: From Where I Sit



### Voices for Gifted: We All Must Lead

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I suspect that most of us work in contexts in which we are the only individual knowledgeable about gifted children or trained in gifted education—the only teacher in our school or district or the only faculty member of a college or university. That puts each of us in a very special (if not lonely at times) position and obligates us to be leaders and vocal advocates for gifted children and for gifted education practices and models. How can we prepare for and succeed in this leadership role that we may not have sought, but necessarily must fulfill?

First we must be well informed, particularly about the BIGGER PICTURE of gifted education—the scene beyond our own local setting.

So, much information comes our way on a daily basis that it is very difficult to choose what is most important to read. Here is my list of “must reads” for our roles as zealous gifted education supporters.

- Read the [overview](#) of the [2010-2011 State of the States report](#) that reviews information gleaned from 44 states regarding their legislation, policies, and funding for gifted services and for the training of educators of the gifted. This report will help you speak to others about the status of gifted education and services in the U.S. You can use the [“Gifted by State”](#) map to find out how your state compares to other nearby states in terms of funding and policies, etc. Being a strong advocate for gifted children requires being able to speak to others

about how policies (and the lack thereof) affect the delivery of appropriate services to children.

- Keep abreast of what is happening at the federal level regarding legislation that could affect gifted education. NAGC post updates periodically on its website—see the “[Legislative Update](#)”—regarding reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the status of funding for the [Javits Act](#), and NAGC’s legislative agenda, including the TALENT Act. Join the [NAGC Legislative Action Network](#) and act on email requests from NAGC prompting you to write to your Members of Congress. Your ability to inform colleagues about the bigger scene in education and how it relates to gifted education may result in opportunities to connect with them on education issues they care about as well as identify and/or recruit additional supporters of gifted education.
- Push and use the [NAGC standards](#), particularly the [PK-Grade 12 Gifted Education Programming Standards](#). Each standard includes the underlying research to support it. Ask your principal or superintendent to purchase the standards book, [available from the NAGC online bookstore](#). Share this valuable resource with other teachers and administrators and bring it to discussions about curriculum and program planning—and program evaluation.
- Begin to educate yourself about the relationship between the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and curriculum for gifted students. You’ll find numerous resources on the [NAGC website](#) prepared by members of the NAGC Professional Standards Committee. Two booklets are forthcoming that will provide additional tools and resources for differentiating the CCSS in Mathematics and English Language Arts for high-ability students.

While the CCSS have been judged by gifted experts to be more rigorous than existing standards, emphasizing advanced content and higher-level thinking skills, they are not sufficient for gifted students and if strictly adhered to, may even hold back very gifted students.

We all need to remind our colleagues about how important gifted programming still is for high-ability students and that the CCSS do not relieve schools or districts of the responsibility to provide appropriate opportunities for gifted learners. You can use the NAGC resources to illustrate the points of connection between the CCSS and gifted program models.

- Familiarize yourself with the [position papers](#) on the NAGC website. Each document pulls together research on a specific topic in gifted education and makes recommendations for practice. Most also include an annotated bibliography. Position papers exist on many of the most

important topics in our field including dual exceptionality, underachievement, acceleration, identification and assessment. These are useful to give to parents and share with fellow teachers and administrators. This is one quick way to initiate discussions with colleagues and to educate them about gifted children and gifted education practices.

- Though it can be extremely challenging, keep current on important research. Typically, NAGC highlights the most important studies on its [website](#). A good example is the recent study "[Do High Flyers Maintain Their Altitude? Performance Trends of Top Students](#)," sponsored by the Fordham Foundation. This study showed that 38% to 50% of students who are in the top 10% of achievement in math or reading fall out of that category as they progress through school. These results demonstrate that high achieving children will not "make it on their own" and need support and appropriate educational placements and programs to maintain their high achieving status. This study, and other key studies, can be the basis of a presentation to other teachers at your school or in your district or can be shared with school and district administrators.

Being knowledgeable is only the first step in being a leader within your school or district, college or university. Armed with good information and a firm grasp of the big picture, we must also summon our courage to speak up at every opportunity—in casual conversations and at formal meetings—and educate our colleagues and supervisors about research on gifted children, best practices in gifted education, and the importance of removing obstacles to talent development.

Editor's Note: If you have served in a committee leadership position or chaired an NAGC Network, it may be time to think about contributing at the highest level within NAGC – the NAGC Board of Directors. [NAGC is now accepting nominations](#). The NAGC Networks will also hold elections. A list of Network openings can be found [online](#). Application materials must be postmarked by April 9, 2012. Newly elected Board Members and Network leaders will begin their terms of service on September 1, 2012.