

Gifted Awareness Week 2017

DIVERSITY

In diversity there is beauty and there is strength

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Joint Position Statement: Indicators of progress and achievement for gifted and talented learners

The Ministry of Education's (2016) four year plan (2016-2020) states that data - "knowledge and evidence to help individuals, providers, communities and government make better decisions" - are foundational in enabling the conditions necessary for curriculum delivery that will result in meeting the Ministry's intermediate objectives and long-term outcomes.

This Position Statement supports the view that key data must be collected in relation to gifted and talented learners if a solid foundation that is inclusive of diverse abilities and qualities is to be ensured. Collection of this data is critical in setting the stage for delivery of an education which is "relevant and reaches all children and students," in which "every child and student achieves educational success," and from which all "New Zealanders have skills and knowledge for work and life" (Ministry of Education, 2016).

The collection of data is ultimately to support student learning but is also necessary to enable the effective functioning of school administration. The Ministry of Education identifies four key ways in which data is utilised for these purposes: supporting learners through their education, evidence that informs inquiry to enhance teacher practice, data-driven evidence to support decision making, and for administrative activities such as records, organisation of activities and reporting to stakeholders.

The Student Information Sharing Initiative (Ministry of Education, 2016) is in development at the time of the release of this Position Statement. The purpose of this initiative is to overcome current barriers to information sharing and access, however it will only be effective if the "data gathered is valid and sufficiently comprehensive so that progress and achievement can be evaluated" (Ministry of Education, n.d.). The data must be accurate, up-to-date, tailored, targeted, relevant and accessible (Ministry of Education, 2014). Currently, there are several barriers to ensuring that data around progress and achievement for gifted and talented learners meet these criteria.

Significant Barriers to Collecting and Sharing Relevant Data on Gifted and Talented Learners

1. Progress from Year 0 -10 is difficult to track and report on. While the National Standards show a snapshot of where a child is at any given point in time, it does not represent their learning progress.
2. Presently, there are National Standard indicators of achievement for “well below,” “below,” “at,” and “above” for learners in Years 0 - 8. There is no indicator for “well above,” nor any way to express just how far above the expected level any given learner is and, if working above their year level, where they are achieving or where progress has been made if they are sitting above standard. This currently prevents schools from meeting Domain 4 of the Education Review Office Indicators where it outlines that all students have an opportunity to learn (Education Review Office, 2016)
3. Indicators of progress and achievement for Years 9 and 10 are unclear. Students are not assessed against either National Standards or NCEA, therefore there is no clear way to report achievement. Nor is there any clear way to assess or report progress.
4. Data on gifted and talented learners as a group of priority learners with special education needs is not requested by the Ministry of Education. Therefore schools have no impetus to collect this data. This results in a lack of data specific to this group of learners, which impacts negatively on how these learners are supported through their education. Furthermore, it represents a failure to gather evidence to either inform inquiries for enhancing teacher practice or underpin data-driven evidence to support decision making.

Recommendations

- A “well above” indicator needs to be added into the National Standards reporting framework.
- A means of recording and sharing learning progress is needed, to move beyond the ‘snapshot in time’ provided through the use of National Standards.
- Year 9 and 10 need clear indicators of learning progress and achievement.
- The Ministry of Education must insist that schools collect relevant data on the learning and achievement of gifted and talented learners as a group of priority learners with special educational needs.

Summary

The New Zealand Centre for Gifted Education, giftEDnz and The New Zealand Association for Gifted Children see only positive developments resulting from a purposeful gathering of data on gifted and talented students’ progress and achievement. More targeted and relevant data gathering will lead to a greater understanding of the diverse needs of our gifted and talented young people. Schools will:

- be better equipped to effectively support diverse learners through their education,
- be more accurate in determining the necessary professional learning required to enhance teacher practice,
- have truly data-driven evidence that supports decision making affecting these diverse learners, and feeds relevant, accurate and necessary information into administrative activities such as records, organisation of activities and reporting to stakeholders such as students, whanau, Communities of Learning, and the Ministry of Education.

References

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