CogAT™

Best Practices for Gifted Placement and Programming

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As a Gifted Coordinator and Manager, I was always focused on providing outstanding services for our students, supporting parents to meet the unique needs of their learners, and identifying all Gifted children in our district for services. Even amidst budget restraints, social & cultural pressures, and a global pandemic, we relied on *CogAT* to help us identify and serve our gifted students. (See one of my previous blog posts about why I used the *CogAT* as our assessment of choice: Voice of a Gifted Coordinator: Why CogAT for Gifted Identification? (riversideinsights.com).) The *CogAT* provided us with valuable data to make placement and programming decisions for our students.

Using *CogAT* Data for Placement Decisions

All states have different testing mandates and expectations for identifying Gifted learners. **The *CogAT* allowed my district to meet our state's expectations and proved to be a sound data point in identifying our students for different services.** In Arizona, we could place students in the areas of Verbal, Quantitative, and Nonverbal; a student who scored at the 97th percentile or higher should receive Gifted services in that area.

Beyond the strict 97th percentile scores, we could also place students using a high Nonverbal score (above the 97th percentile) into services if their Verbal or Quantitative score was close to the 97th percentile, but not quite there. Frequently, we provided these students with pull-out services for math or reading, expanding enrichment opportunities and Gifted services for a wider range of students.

We also used *CogAT's* Composite Score to place students into Gifted services. The Composite Score combined all three areas and the percentile (according to their age) to place students who again were just shy of the cut-off. These students were close to the 97th percentile cut-off and frequently benefited from additional services. As a district, because we had the flexibility, we also provisionally identified and placed students down to the 95th percentile as a general practice at all schools.

 These different methods of identification and placement enabled us to find all students who might benefit from our Gifted programming. It also allowed us to pull larger groups of students at each grade level. Slightly larger groups often fostered better group work environments, stronger classroom debates and discussions with multiple viewpoints, and higher retention of bright students who may have left our district for other options without this programming.

Implementing the Right Gifted Programs for Your District

In my previous role, I oversaw 20+ different gifted programs and services. We were a large Preschool through 12th grade district in the Phoenix area with very diverse communities. I worked with each school's Gifted Specialist and School Administrator to develop the programs and services to best meet the needs of their unique community. When designing the programs, we also incorporated the teachers' strengths, parent expectations, enrolment numbers, etc. Some of our services at the elementary levels are included and summarized below. For more information on our main service, the Gifted cluster model, please see my webinar from September 2022 titled, "This Student is Gifted. Now What?"

Gifted Cluster was our primary Gifted services model. We chose this model for many reasons, including:

- It is a full day service model
- It did not require increased staffing
- Our gifted specialist teachers/coaches were able to service more grade levels and students

When students are placed into classrooms correctly following the model, we had great success – we met our students' needs, regardless of the community the school served, the students earned better test scores, and our teachers were happier as they were better able to support all of the students at each school.

Content replacement was offered in the areas of math and reading. A trained Gifted teacher replaced the general education course with a more enriched program for reading and a more accelerated program, with some enrichment, for math. Students were in a small class with a teacher who specialized in teaching Gifted students. The downside of this model is that one Gifted specialist was only servicing a small group of students at a time.

Walk-Up to Math was when the group or cluster of Gifted students walked up to the next grade level for their math class. This model required schools to set up a time in the day where math was all taught at the same time. It also required teachers to understand Gifted learners and create warm and inclusive classrooms as the students moved up one or two grade levels to the grade that met their academic needs. School Gifted Specialists pushed in to support the classroom teachers and coordinated services for the students when they "walked" to grade levels higher than what their school physically offered.

In this model, the Gifted Specialists/Coaches were able to service more students than the pull-out (content replacement) model. The students in these programs consistently out-scored the students in the pull out programs as well.

Supplemental Enrichment Courses was a program developed in our schools servicing our communities in poverty. However, it quickly spread to most of our K-6 and K-8 campuses. With students clustered in homeroom classes throughout the day and then walking up to meet their math needs, our teachers turned to offering a 30 – 45-minute enrichment pullout for qualifying students. In our higher poverty schools, this allowed them to incorporate more creative activities, arts, STEM projects, and targeted social and emotional support for these students.

Self-Contained Magnet Programs were important for our highly gifted learners. We created three magnet programs that not only offered smaller class sizes, but also focused on project- and problem-based learning, as well as acceleration and enrichment. The programs used the Gifted identification scores

as well as other data such as academic data, teacher, and parent input to ensure students were prepared for a more rigorous program model. Our three signature services were a music program, STEM program, and a global studies program.

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