

**STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA**  
**DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**

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**Gifted and Talented Best Practices Guidelines:  
Assessment**

Pursuant to S.C. Code Ann. § 59-29-170  
and State Board of Education Regulation 43-220

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## Introduction

*“Knowledge about all forms of assessment is essential for educators of students with gifts and talents. It is integral to identification, assessing each student’s learning progress, and evaluation of programming. Educators need to establish a challenging environment and collect multiple types of assessment information so that all students are able to demonstrate their gifts and talents”* (National Association for Gifted Children, 2010 p. 4).

Along with specifying curriculum and instruction requirements, Regulation 43-220 calls for assessment that maximizes the potential of identified students. Assessment involves the collection and organization of data related to student performance. Evaluation involves using assessment data to determine how well a student is performing in relation to pre-established criteria. The purposes of this document are two-fold: (1) to describe ways of assessing student achievement of gifted and talented curriculum goals and (2) to present methods of analyzing assessment data to evaluate student performance.

The discussion of assessment and evaluation in this document incorporates the following principles:

1. Student assessment is an integral part of curriculum design and of each instructional unit.
2. The assessment tools used for a particular curriculum objective must be appropriate for the measurement of that objective.
3. The criteria which students are expected to meet in their performance must be presented at the beginning of instruction.

## The Legislative Mandate

Requirements outlined in these guidelines are provided pursuant to S.C. Code Ann. § 59-29-170 (Programs for Talented Students), which can be accessed at <http://www.scstatehouse.gov/code/title59.php>.

Not later than August 15, 1987, gifted and talented students at the elementary and secondary levels must be provided programs during the regular school year or during summer school to develop their unique talents in the manner the State Board of Education must specify and to the extent state funds are provided. The Education Oversight Committee shall study the implementation of this section and report its findings to the General Assembly by July 1, 1986. By August 15, 1984, the State Board of Education shall promulgate regulations establishing the criteria for student eligibility in Gifted and Talented Programs. The funds appropriated for Gifted and Talented Programs under the Education Improvement Act of 1984 must be allocated to the school districts of the State on the basis that the number of gifted and talented students served in each district bears to the total of all those students in the State. However, districts unable to identify more than forty students using the selection criteria established by regulations of the State Board of

Education shall receive fifteen thousand dollars annually. Provided, further, school districts shall serve gifted and talented students according to the following order of priority: (1) grades 3-12 academically identified gifted and talented students not included in the state-funded Advanced Placement Program for eleventh and twelfth grade students; (2) after all students eligible under priority one are served, students in grades 3-12 identified in one of the following visual and performing arts areas: dance, drama, music, and visual arts must be served; and (3) after all students eligible under priorities one and two are served, students in grades 1 and 2 identified as academically or artistically gifted and talented must be served. All categories of students identified and served shall be funded at a weight of .30 for the base student cost as provided in Chapter 20 of this title. Where funds are insufficient to serve all students in a given category, the district may determine which students within the category shall be served. Provided, further, no district shall be prohibited from using local funds to serve additional students above those for whom state funds are provided.

Regulation 43-220 (2013) states the following pertaining to assessment:

(a) Districts must ensure that all assessment instruments/measures are reviewed for bias and accurately assess the abilities/skills/potential intended to be measured; these abilities/skills/potentials are consistent with the definition of population set forth in this regulation; and, to the extent that subjective assessment criteria are used, those individuals conducting the assessment are trained to ensure proper evaluation.

(b) No private testing will be accepted for eligibility, but those results may be considered for referral purposes.

(c) The following criteria organized by dimensions shall be used in the screening/referral/assessment processes of identification:

(1) Dimension A: Reasoning Abilities

These students demonstrate high aptitude (93rd national age percentile or above) in one or more of these areas: verbal/linguistic, quantitative/mathematical, nonverbal, and/or a composite of the three.

a) Individual aptitude test (full-scale or component score)

b) Group aptitude test (composite, verbal, or nonverbal scores)

(2) Dimension B: High Achievement in Reading and/or Mathematical Areas

These students demonstrate high achievement (94th national percentile and above or meet criteria set forth by the SCDE) in reading and/or mathematical areas as measured by nationally normed or South Carolina statewide assessment instruments. (See the most current edition of the *South Carolina Gifted and Talented Best Practices Manual* for approved subtest areas.)

(3) Dimension C: Intellectual/Academic Performance

These students demonstrate a high degree of interest in and commitment to academic and/or intellectual pursuits or demonstrate intellectual characteristics such as curiosity/inquiry, reflection, persistence/tenacity in the face of challenge and creative productive thinking. Characteristics for this dimension are demonstrated through

a) Evidence of commitment in academic disciplines through grades for placement in grades six through twelve; the standard is 3.75 points on a 4.0 scale (See the glossary of terms for a listing of the academic disciplines.);

or

b) Assessments of performance on STAR Performance Task Assessment for placement in grades three through six. Instruments for these assessments will be maintained secure under S.C. Code Ann. Section 59-1-445 (1990), Section 59-1-445, Violations of mandatory test security; penalties; investigations. The performance standard for the primary level is sixteen on either the verbal or nonverbal assessments for placement into grade three and eighteen on either the verbal or nonverbal assessment for placement into grade four. The performance standard for the intermediate level is sixteen on the verbal or twenty-two on the nonverbal for placement into grade five and eighteen on the verbal or twenty-five on the nonverbal for placement into grade six. The qualifying standards for new forms of STAR Performance Task Assessment will be equivalent to those of the base year.

(4) Districts will follow steps established by the SCDE to guarantee no single criterion eliminates students from gifted and talented programming participation.

## Assessing Student Achievement

NAGC Programming Standard 2.4 (2010) highlights key components for assessing student achievement. This standard states, “Learning Progress and Outcomes. Students with gifts and talents demonstrate advanced and complex learning as a result of using multiple, appropriate, and ongoing assessments” (p. 2).

### *Evaluating Knowledge Acquisition*

The most effective methods of evaluating knowledge acquisition involve comparing student responses on pre- and post-assessment measures. Pre- and post-assessments are essential for the evaluation of gifted and talented students. All too often, when pre-assessments are omitted, instruction focuses on content the students already know. Effective utilization of pre- and post-assessment comparisons can ensure that instruction focuses on new learning for the gifted and talented and, accordingly, that the culminating evaluation reflects real change in knowledge and understanding.

### *Pre-assessment Strategies*

It is imperative for teachers to determine prior to instruction what students already know and can do. Only by assessing a student’s current level of knowledge and skill can a teacher ensure that new learning will take place as a result of instruction. Teachers can pre-assess content knowledge and skills through a variety of strategies such as those listed below.

#### Pre-Assessment of Content Knowledge

- Oral questioning
- Brainstorming
- Concept maps
- “Need to Know” boards
- Checklists
- Conventional written tests

#### Pre-Assessment of Skills

- Portfolio reviews
- Performance tasks
- Examination or assessment of previous products
- Review of previous assessments of the skill

### *Assessment During Instruction*

Assessment must be ongoing throughout the instructional process. Teachers collect assessment data through observing and monitoring student progress toward instructional goals. Strategies appropriate for this stage of the assessment process may include:

- Observation of student involvement/interaction,
- Oral questioning,

- Monitoring of student practice,
- Formative measure that is scored for diagnostic purposes (not graded), and
- Spot checks of products in progress (not graded)
- Ongoing Portfolio review.

Students should be active participants in monitoring their progress during instruction. Accordingly, teachers should guide students through the process of self-assessment and goal-setting. Once goals have been set, students should assess their personal progress towards goals. Students can use self-assessment strategies such as:

- Learning logs or journals,
- Checklists,
- Rubrics,
- Conferencing, and
- Peer review.

### *Post-Assessment Strategies*

To determine student progress, the teacher should use post-assessment strategies that are consistent with the instruction provided. Post-assessment strategies must also be consistent with the assessment strategies used before and during instruction. Possible post-assessment strategies include:

- Written tests,
- Concept maps,
- “Need to Know” boards,
- Other graphic organizers,
- Performance tasks,
- Products, projects, and presentations, and
- Portfolios.

All of the assessment measures described above are criterion-referenced. These are the appropriate kinds of measures for assessing individual student progress toward mastery of specific goals or objectives. In contrast to these criterion-referenced measures, there are a number of standardized norm-referenced assessment measures that can be used to identify a specific sample within a general population of students. Because norm-referenced tests have this purpose, such measures are appropriate for the identification of gifted and talented students, but they are not appropriate for the assessment of students’ progress toward curriculum goals.

## **Evaluating Skill Development**

### *Establishing Performance Criteria*

All units of study should be standards-based. The teacher should present the criteria by which student performance will be evaluated. The criteria should vary with the skills to be assessed with a weighted emphasis on demonstrating knowledge and depth of understanding of the standard.

In addition teachers should remain cognizant of the Profile of the South Carolina Graduate and should structure performance criteria accordingly. Standards-based curriculum should incorporate the concepts of world-class knowledge, world-class skills, and life and career characteristics. Teachers should reference the goals set forth in the curriculum and instruction guidelines provided by the SCDE.

### *Using Exemplars*

A key to effective instruction and assessment is the use of exemplars, samples of student products or responses that illustrate the levels of proficiency described by the rubric. Exemplars can assist in the development of consistency among teachers in evaluating student work. In addition, exemplars can serve as models for students. By studying exemplars, students can see work of varying degrees of proficiency and begin to establish a sense of the quality of their own work and the changes they need to make to raise their level of performance.

### *Developing an Evaluation Plan*

The evaluation of growth in student achievement over an extended period of time requires the development and implementation of a specific evaluation plan. When establishing such a plan, the teacher should identify those curriculum goals for which the focus is student growth over time. The plan should articulate evaluation procedures for each goal, specifying the following:

- the time period over which student growth will be evaluated;
- the developmental stages—and levels of proficiency at each stage—through which students can be expected to move during the designated time period;
- a list of checkpoints at which student achievement will be assessed and evaluated; and
- descriptions of the documentation of student achievement or performance level that will be collected at each checkpoint.

### *Using the Evaluation Conference*

A three-way (student, teacher, parent) conference can be another useful component of an evaluation plan. In such a conference, the student, teacher, and parent meet to review the documentation of the student's growth. They analyze the student's current performance level, the amount and quality of change since the previous conference, and areas that should be targeted for future growth.

As students become accustomed to three-way conferences, they can gradually assume greater responsibility for conducting the conference. The student-conducted conference has the added benefit of promoting self-evaluation and goal setting, two skills that are fundamental if students are to become self-directed learners.

### *Reporting Student Progress*

An effective program establishes a reporting schedule at the outset of the school year so that parents know when to expect information on their students' achievement. Methods of reporting student progress will vary depending upon the program model and the curriculum.

Gifted and talented students served in special class or special school models should receive the same report cards as other students in the school district. These reports should use the district grading system and be sent home on the regular district schedule. Grades should reflect

evaluation of the gifted and talented student's achievement of the special class or special school curriculum goals. In addition to these traditional report cards, gifted and talented students should receive more specific information regarding their progress in relation to the special class or special school goals (i.e., through checklists or teacher narratives).

Programs for gifted and talented students in a resource room/pull-out class or center vary in their grading procedures, the kinds of reports sent home, and the frequency of reporting (weekly, grading period, semester, or end of unit). Some programs use the district grading system, while others have developed their own grading systems.

### **Exemplary Reporting Practices**

Gifted and talented programs that are using best practices have a reporting system which communicates student progress on a regular basis. The reporting system should include a profile of student knowledge and proficiency in relation to gifted and talented curriculum goals.

An effective gifted and talented program utilizes more extensive reporting procedures than the traditional report card. Even when traditional report cards are used, as in a special class model, they should be supplemented with one or more of the following reporting practices:

- Evaluation reports on special products and performances;
- Student self-reports in which the student reports to the teacher and parent his/her progress relative to specific learning goals;
- Unit evaluations that communicate the student's level of skill proficiency and/or knowledge acquisition relative to unit objectives;
- Gifted and talented program progress report listing curriculum goals and indicating the student's level of achievement for each; and/or
- Annual longitudinal growth conference in which the student, teacher, and parent discuss the student's growth over time.

### **Review of Placement**

The results of student assessment and evaluation may prompt questions about the appropriateness of a student's placement in the gifted and talented program. A student who finds work difficult and/or who performs poorly may seek to leave the gifted and talented program—perhaps out of concern about grade-point average or because of doubts about his/her abilities. A teacher may want a student who performs at a relatively low level to be removed from the program, perhaps because of questions about whether the student is “truly gifted and talented.” It is important to keep in mind that judgments about the student and his/her abilities may or may not be valid.

Effective gifted and talented programs have clearly established and written procedures for reviewing student placement, in order to ensure the following:

1. that students who do need gifted and talented programming are provided with the support they need to succeed, and
2. that students who may be mismatched with a particular class or service can have their placement adjusted to better meet their needs.

### *Procedures for Review of Placement*

Best practices in gifted and talented education require that the individual student and his/her academic and intellectual development be the focus of all placement discussions, including the possible removal of a student. Any procedures that a district develops for reviewing a student's placement must incorporate a child study approach involving the gifted and talented program coordinator, student, parent/guardian, and teacher(s). The school or district evaluation/placement team that carries out the evaluation step in the initial identification process shall also be involved in the review process.

Placement decisions resulting from a child study should have as their primary consideration the best instructional setting for the individual student. Upon receiving a withdrawal request or a request for review of placement, the coordinator should schedule a conference with the initiating party to gather additional information about the request. The coordinator will schedule other conferences and gather other information as needed to develop a full picture of the student's situation. The coordinator will schedule a meeting with the evaluation/placement team to share the data collected and initiate a child study involving the student, parent/guardian, and teacher(s). Appropriate questions for the evaluation/placement team are as follows:

- What is the reason for the request?
- Do the curriculum and instructional strategies match the student's needs?
- Are the needs of the student being met in the regular classroom?
- Is excessive homework a contributing factor?
- Are there any underlying factors that need to be addressed?
  - Motivation?
  - Academic strength/class mismatch?
  - Skill deficits or content knowledge deficits?
  - Lack of access to resources (e.g., materials, library)?
  - Study skill deficits?
  - Time-management problems?
  - Learning style mismatch?
  - Other?
- How can the situation be addressed through provision of support services?
- What interventions will be implemented and what time frame will be established?
- Is an adjustment in placement warranted? If so, what is the best placement for the student?

Often situations which prompt a student, parent, or teacher to request review of a student's placement in the gifted and talented program are ones that can be addressed through conferencing and provision of appropriate support services rather than through withdrawal or removal of the student from the program. A child study conducted by an evaluation/placement

team can be helpful to the student, parent, and teacher by clarifying the situation, making recommendations for regular classroom modifications, and providing appropriate support services for the student.

### *Guidelines for Removal of Students*

The gifted and talented program exists to provide services to identified students that will develop their unique talents and abilities. Participation in an educational program that goes beyond the services provided by the regular classroom/school program should allow these students to achieve their potential. Identified students have demonstrated high performance ability or potential and therefore have the right to these additional services. Moreover, the services provided for identified students must match their area(s) of strength(s) (i.e., the way a student qualified for gifted and talented). Gifted and talented students are sometimes twice exceptional or underachievers. Therefore, the denial of services to a student who has qualified for gifted and talented requires careful attention and serious consideration.

Regulation 43-220 requires districts to develop criteria for procedures for removing a student from the gifted and talented program. The Regulation states, “The team will be responsible for developing appropriate written procedures for removing a student from the gifted and talented programming. Removal from the programming must be preceded by appropriate counseling with the student and conferences with the student’s parents and teachers. Records of any assessment and evaluative measures and other student information must be maintained in a confidential manner.”

### *Removal from the Pullout/Resource Room*

Gifted and talented students served in the pullout/resource room program model often experience management problems as they learn to maintain and balance the responsibilities of the regular classroom and the resource room. The skills and strategies to function successfully in these two environments must be taught. Students should not be expected to navigate between these two educational settings without the support of the classroom teacher and the pullout/resource teacher. Frequent interactions and joint planning between the classroom teacher and the pullout/resource room teacher are critical to the success of students.

Research on the performance of students in South Carolina’s pullout/resource room program models suggests that students need two complete years in the program to make the adjustments of working in a regular classroom and pullout/resource room. To remove a child prior to two years of active participation in a pullout/resource program is a questionable action without substantive concerns for the student’s physical, emotional, or social health.

Criteria for removal from a pullout/resource room program:

1. A child has completed two years in the program, and performance in the regular classroom and/or the pullout/resource room has not been acceptable by both the parent(s) and the teacher(s).
2. Regular conferences with the student, teachers, and parent(s) have been conducted and documented.
3. Specific strategies for supporting and improving student performance have been implemented and monitored by the student, parent(s), and teacher(s).

4. Regular counseling has been provided by the school's guidance counselor to support the student during the probation period.
5. Grade point average is not the sole indicator for removal under most circumstances.
6. Poor behavior is not the sole indicator for removal under most circumstances.
7. A student's social, emotional, or physical health is a factor related to removal from the program.
8. The student and parent(s) are advised that the student may return to full participation in the gifted and talented program at the beginning of the next school year. The student is not required to re-qualify for participation.

#### *Removal from the Special Class or Special School Program Model*

Gifted and talented students served in the special class or special school program model are engaged with a curriculum that reflects acceleration and enrichment in a specific discipline. Both the special class and special school model recognize that students display high ability or potential in some academic areas but not in others.

If a student is removed from a special class or special school and returned to the regular class or school, the ability of the student to perform adequately in the special class or special school must be addressed. Adequate performance must not be measured solely by grades. Careful consideration must be given to providing academic support, accommodating learning styles, ensuring a curriculum match with the student's strengths, addressing motivational issues, and attending to any social, emotional, or physical concerns that might affect student performance.

Criteria for removal from a special class or special school program:

1. A child has completed a minimum of one report card grading period but no more than a semester in the special class or special school, and performance has not been acceptable by both the parent(s) and the teacher(s).
2. Regular conferences with the student, teacher(s), and parent(s) have been conducted and documented throughout the grading period(s).
3. Specific strategies for supporting and improving student performance have been implemented and monitored by the student, parent(s), and teacher(s).
4. General counseling to support the student has been provided regularly by the school's guidance counselor.
5. Grade point average is not the sole indicator for removal under most circumstances.
6. Poor behavior is not the sole indicator under most circumstances.
7. A student's social, emotional, or physical health is a factor related to removal from the program.
8. The student and parent(s) are advised that the student may return to full participation in the gifted and talented program at the beginning of the next school year. The student is not required to re-qualify for participation.

#### *Removal of a Student by a Parent*

If a parent wishes to remove his or her child from the gifted and talented program, the parent should complete a request for removal form specifying the reasons for this request. This form will be given to the district coordinator of gifted and talented programs who will conduct a meeting of the evaluation/placement team with the student, parent, and teacher present. The

evaluation/placement team will make a final recommendation for approving or denying the request. When responding to the request of a parent, the same criteria for removal should be applied whenever possible. If a student is removed from the gifted and talented program at the request of a parent, the student may return to full participation in the gifted and talented program at the beginning of the next school year should the student or parent request services. The student is not required to re-qualify for participation.

## **References**

National Association for Gifted Education (2010). *Gifted programming standards, standard Two: assessment*. Retrieved from <https://www.nagc.org/resources-publications/resources/national-standards-gifted-and-talented-education/pre-k-grade-12-0>