

A NATIONAL STUDY OF CURRICULUM POLICIES AND PRACTICES
IN GIFTED EDUCATION

By Kimberley Chandler

ABSTRACT

The systemic reform movement has created pressure for more ambitious outcomes for every student. High stakes state testing for all learners has generated new discussions about the nature of appropriate curriculum for gifted students within the context of a standards-based system. Although the importance of appropriate curriculum is emphasized throughout the literature of gifted education, the specific curricular provisions for gifted students in all fifty states and the extent to which curriculum for gifted students compares to the minimum and exemplary standards outlined in the *NAGC Pre-K – Grade 12 Gifted Program Standards* have not been studied. The purpose of this study was to determine the extent to which policies are in place to feed best practices for curriculum for gifted learners.

In this descriptive study, survey data were collected regarding curricular provisions for gifted students in all 50 states, the impact of both standards-based reform in core content areas and in gifted education upon the process of curriculum development for gifted students, and factors that support or impede the appropriate modification of curricula for gifted students. Rules and regulations regarding gifted program curriculum guidelines and extant curricula were also analyzed. The purpose of collecting these data was to determine the extent to which policies are in place that feed best practices for curriculum for gifted learners are employed in school districts in the United States.

Findings from this study indicated that the rhetoric in gifted education about the importance of differentiated curriculum is not supported by actual practice at the state or local level as perceived by state directors. A majority of the respondents indicated that research studies regarding curriculum effectiveness are used only to a slight extent or not at all at the state level in the decision-making process for materials selection. The study also showed a limited knowledge base of the state directors about the theories/models of curriculum that influenced the development of guidelines defining appropriate curricula to be used with academically gifted students. Although the respondents indicated that curriculum is the area of program development that they consider second in importance only after identification, their practices seem to contradict this finding. While the state directors have perceived priorities in mind, there is a discrepancy between their perceptions, their priorities, and documents that represent state curriculum guidelines.

Implications for policy, practice, and additional research provide deeper insight into the workings of curriculum research, policy, and practice.