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## Introduction

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The purpose of this booklet is to provide classroom teachers and administrators examples and strategies to implement the new Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English Language Arts for advanced learners at all stages of development in K–12 schools. One aspect of fulfilling that purpose is to clarify what advanced opportunities look like for such learners from primary through secondary grade levels. In other words, we want to demonstrate effective differentiation for top learners in English language arts (ELA). How can schools provide the level of rigor and relevance within the new standards as they translate them into experiences for gifted learners? How can they provide creative and innovative opportunities to learn what will nurture the thinking and problem solving of our best students in ELA?

This booklet also serves as a primer for basic policies and practices related to advanced learners in school. At all levels, schools must be flexible in the implementation of policies related to acceleration, waivers, and course credit, all of which may impact gifted learners. The developers of the CCSS acknowledged that advanced learners may move through the standards more readily than other learners (National Governors Association [NGA])

& Council of Chief State School Officers [CCSSO], 2010a), attesting to the importance of using differentiated approaches for these students to attain mastery and/or progress in academic achievement at their level. It is critical that schools allow for flexibility in these areas and others in order to accommodate our advanced learners.

In this booklet, we also want to demonstrate a trajectory for talent development in language arts that lends vision to the work of teachers as they deliver classroom instruction at one level but prepare students for the succeeding levels in the journey toward the real world of language-based careers. What is the progressive development of skills, habits of mind, and attitudes toward learning needed to reach high levels of competency and creative production in language-related fields? How does the pathway from novice to expert differ among promising learners? What is the trajectory for children of poverty with respect to time and effort, and how does it differ from that of more advantaged learners?

The booklet also includes multiple resources in the appendix material to support educators in developing and modifying materials for students who are advanced in English language arts. In addition to including a list of definitions of the key terms used in the booklet (Appendix A), we have included a research base of best practices in gifted education (Appendix B).

This booklet is also based on a set of underlying assumptions about the constructs of giftedness and talent development that underpin the thinking that spawned this work. These assumptions are:

- Giftedness is developed over time through the interaction of potential with nurturing environmental conditions. The process is developmental, dynamic, and malleable.
- Many learners show preferences for particular subject matter early and continue to select learning opportunities that match their predispositions if they are provided with opportunities to do so. For many children, especially those in poverty, schools are the primary source for relevant opportunities to develop domain-specific poten-

tial, although markers of talent development also emerge from work done outside of school in co-curricular or extracurricular contexts.

- Aptitudes may emerge as a result of exposure to high-level, challenging activities in an area of interest. Teachers should consider using advanced learning activities and techniques as a stimulus for all learners.
- In the talent development process, there is an interaction effect between affect and cognition, leading to heightened intrinsic motivation of the individual and focus on the enjoyable tasks associated with the talent area. This dynamic tension catalyzes movement to the next level of advanced work in the area.
- Intellectual, cultural, and learning diversity among learners may account for different rates of learning, different areas of aptitude, different cognitive styles, and different experiential backgrounds. Working with such diversity in the classroom requires teachers to differentiate and customize curriculum and instruction, always working to provide an optimal match between the learner and her readiness to encounter the next level of challenge.

Users of this booklet should note that the ideas contained herein are not intended to apply exclusively to identified gifted students; they also apply to those students who show an interest and readiness to learn within the domain of English language arts. Students with high potential and advanced readers would be candidates for a differentiated ELA curriculum.

Finally, it is our hope that this booklet provides a roadmap for meaningful national, state, and local educational reform that elevates learning in English language arts to higher levels of rigor for gifted—and, indeed, all—learners who can benefit from the elevation of task demands suggested.

# The Common Core State Standards

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The Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts are K–12 content standards that illustrate the curriculum emphases needed for students to develop the skills and concepts required for the 21st century. Adopted by 45 states to date, the CCSS are organized into key content domains and articulated across all years of schooling and, when adopted, replace the existing state content standards. The initiative has been state-based and coordinated by the National Governors Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). Designed by teachers, administrators, and content experts, the CCSS are intended to prepare K–12 students for college and the workplace.

The new CCSS are evidence-based, aligned with expectations for success in college and the workplace, and informed by the successes and failures of the current standards and international competition demands. The new standards stress rigor, depth, clarity, and coherence, drawing from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Frameworks in Reading and Writing (National Assessment Governing Board [NAGB], 2008, 2010). They provide a framework for curriculum

development work, which remains to be done—although many states are already engaged in the process. States such as Indiana, Minnesota, Illinois, and Maine are working within and across local districts to design relevant curriculum and to align current practices to the new standards.

## Rationale for the Work

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The adoption of the Common Core State Standards in almost every state is cause for gifted education as a field to reflect on its role in supporting gifted and high-potential learners appropriately in the content areas. The field of gifted education has not always differentiated systematically in the core domains of learning, but rather has focused on interdisciplinary concepts, higher level skills, and problem solving, typically across domains. With the new CCSS and their national focus, it becomes critical to show how to differentiate for gifted learners within a set of standards that are reasonably rigorous in each subject area.

It has been stated by some that the standards do not require any special differentiation for the gifted—and may actually obviate the need for gifted education services because the standards are already at such a high level. Unfortunately, although the standards are strong, they are not sufficiently advanced to accommodate the needs of most gifted learners. Some students will traverse the standards before the end of high school (NGA & CCSSO, 2010a), which will require educators to provide advanced content for them. Beyond accelerative methods, however, there is also a need to enrich the standards by ensuring that there are open-

ended opportunities to meet the standards through multiple pathways, more complex thinking applications, and real-world problem-solving contexts. This requires a deliberate strategy among gifted educators to ensure that the CCSS are translated in a way that allows for differentiated practices to be employed with gifted and high-potential students.

As with all standards, new assessments will likely drive the instructional process. Educators of the gifted must be aware of the need to differentiate assessments that align with the CCSS as well. Gifted learners will need to be assessed through performance-based and portfolio techniques that are based on higher level learning outcomes and that often vary from the more traditional assessments the CCSS may employ.

Although the CCSS appear to be a positive movement for all of education, it is important to be mindful of the ongoing need to differentiate appropriately for top learners. As a field, it is also critical to agree on the need to align with this work so gifted education's voices are at the table as the CCSS become one important basis, along with the newly revised InTASC Model Teacher Standards (CCSSO, 2011), for elevating teacher quality and student learning nationwide.



## Alignment to 21st Century Skills

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This booklet includes a major emphasis on key 21st century skills (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, n.d.) in overall orientation as well as in activities and assessments employed in the examples. Several of these skill sets overlap with the differentiation emphases discussed below in relation to the gifted standards.

The skills receiving major emphases in the booklet examples include:

- *Collaboration*: Students are encouraged to work in dyads and small groups of four to carry out many activities and projects, to discuss readings, and to plan presentations.
- *Communication*: Students are encouraged to develop communication skills in written, oral, visual, and technological modes.
- *Critical thinking*: Students are provided with models of critical thought that are incorporated into classroom activities, questions, and assignments.
- *Creative thinking*: Students are provided with models of creative thinking that develop skills that support innovative thinking and problem solving.

- *Problem solving*: Students are engaged in real-world problem solving and learn the processes involved in such work.
- *Technology literacy*: Students use technology in multiple forms and formats to create generative products.
- *Information media literacy*: Students use multimedia to express ideas and key learnings.
- *Cross-cultural skills*: Students read and discuss works and events representing the perspectives of different cultures and people.

Because these skills are relevant to all learners, the way they are addressed in the differentiated examples that follow is important for educators, as it shows the translation of the skills at higher levels and at earlier stages of development for gifted learners.