Clustering and Flexible Grouping

Topic Overview Video (link)

Why:

Elementary students spend the majority of their time in heterogeneous classroom settings in which the teacher is expected to meet the instructional needs of a wide range of learners. Clustering gifted and high-achieving learners together enables the teacher to more easily provide the appropriate differentiation and acceleration these learners need, especially when coupled with the Professional Learning Community (PLC) process. Additionally, utilizing flexible grouping during instructional units promotes accelerated learning and early mastery of discrete skills, even if they have not been identified for gifted services.

Instructional Implications:

- Teachers more easily can meet students' instructional needs
- Gifted students receive differentiation
- All students are strategically placed for maximum growth opportunity

Guiding Questions:

- How are elementary students placed in classes each year? What characteristics and learning needs are considered?
- How are master schedules created in secondary schools? How are gifted and advanced learners grouped in advanced courses?
- How would cluster grouping impact teacher efficacy and student growth?
- What are state mandates for grouping or clustering identified gifted students?
- What challenges will small campuses face and how will they be addressed?
- What misconceptions may the families have that will need to be addressed? When and how will that occur?
- How will other clustering factors (i.e., SpEd) be considered?
- What will be the timeline for training and implementation? Will you start with pioneer campuses or with full implementation?
- What are the success metrics? How will they be measured?

3 Best Practices:

1. Use a cluster model to intentionally place all students, not just GT students, enabling teachers to more easily differentiate instruction
2. Build master schedules to allow for flexible grouping including cross-class and cross-grade, as well as embedded acceleration opportunities
3. Provide ongoing teacher training on differentiation and flexible grouping strategies

Resources:

(2021, July 30). Ability grouping for Gifted Students. *Davidson Academy.* https://www.davidsonacademy.unr.edu/blog/ability-grouping-for-gifted-students/

Brulles, D., Saunders, R., & Cohn, S.J. (2010). Improving performance for gifted students in a cluster grouping model. *Journal for the Education of the Gifted, 34* (2), 327-350. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ910197.pdf

Gentry, M. (1996). Total school cluster grouping: An investigation of achievement and identification of elementary school students. *The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented.* https://nrcgt.uconn.edu/newsletters/spring964/

Gentry, M., Paul, K.A., McIntosh, J., Fugate, C.M, & Jen, E. (2014). Total School Cluster Grouping & Differentiation (2nd ed.). Prufrock Press.

Johnson, S.K., Simonds, M., & Voss, M. (2021). *Implementing evidence-based practices in gifted education: Professional learning modules on universal screening, grouping, acceleration, and equity in gifted programs.* Prufrock Press.

Winebrenner, S. & Devlin, B. (1992). Cluster grouping fact sheet: How to provide full-time services for gifted students on existing budgets. https://nrcgt.uconn.edu/newsletters/fall926/

Clustering and Flexible Grouping Worksheet

Directions: Use these guiding questions to help you utilize clustering and grouping models to facilitate differentiated instruction.

1

What is your current class placement process at the elementary level? At the secondary level?

2

Does your state have requirements for grouping GT students?

3

Clustering grouping

How would cluster grouping impact your students?

What challenges are barriers to implementing cluster grouping? Consider small campuses, parent perception, teacher perception, and scheduling conflicts.

What is a realistic timeline for implementing cluster grouping? How will you roll it out?

How will you measure the success of your cluster grouping models?