



## Clarifying Common Myths About Gifted Children

### **Gifted students don't need help; they'll do fine on their own**

Would you send a star athlete to train for the Olympics without a coach? Gifted students need guidance from well-trained teachers who challenge and support them in order to fully develop their abilities. Many gifted students may be so far ahead of their same-age peers that they know more than half of the grade-level curriculum before the school year begins. Compare this to having to sit patiently for 4 months before you learn ANYTHING other than how to sit still! Their resulting boredom and frustration can lead to low achievement, despondency, or unhealthy work habits. The role of the teacher is crucial for spotting and nurturing talents in school.

### **Teachers challenge all students, so gifted kids will be fine in the regular classroom**

Although teachers try to challenge all students, they are frequently unfamiliar with the needs of gifted children and do not know how to best serve them in the classroom. The National Research Center on Gifted and Talented (NRC/GT) found that 61% of classroom teachers had no training in teaching highly able students, limiting the challenging educational opportunities offered to advanced learners. A more recent national study conducted by the Fordham Institute found that 58% of teachers have received no professional development focused on teaching academically advanced students in the past few years. Taken together, these reports confirm what many families have known: the majority teachers have no training in working with gifted students. Even those teachers who have training and passion for gifted students, can not possibly meet the needs of 30 students when classrooms are constructed so that each classroom represents the full range of abilities.

### **Gifted students make everyone else in the class smarter by providing a role model or a challenge**

In reality, average or below-average students do not look to the gifted students in the class as role models. They are more likely to model their behavior on those who have similar capabilities and are coping well in school. Seeing a student at a similar performance level succeed, motivates students because it adds to their own sense of ability. Watching or relying on someone who routinely succeeds, does little to increase a struggling student's sense of self-confidence. Similarly, gifted students benefit from classroom interactions with peers at similar performance levels.

### **All children are gifted**

All children have strengths and positive attributes, but not all children are gifted in the educational sense of the word. The label "gifted" in a school setting means that when compared to others his or her age or grade, a child has an advanced capacity to learn and apply what is learned in one or more subject areas, or in the performing or fine arts. This advanced capacity requires modifications to the regular curriculum to ensure these children are challenged and learn new material. Gifted does not connote good or better; it is a term that allows students to be identified for services that meet their unique learning needs.

### **Acceleration placement options are socially harmful for gifted students**

Academically gifted students often feel bored or out of place with age mates and naturally gravitate towards older students who are more similar as “intellectual peers.” Studies have shown that many students are happier with older students who share their interest than they are with children the same age. Therefore, acceleration placement options such as early entrance to Kindergarten, grade skipping, or early exit should be considered for these students. There are many resources available for administrators and parents to assist in making the decision to accelerate.

### **He can't be gifted; he's receiving poor grades**

Underachievement describes a discrepancy between a student's performance and his actual ability. The roots of this problem differ, based on each child's experiences. Gifted students may become bored or frustrated in an unchallenging classroom situation causing them to lose interest, learn bad study habits, or distrust the school environment. Other students may mask their abilities to try to fit in socially with their same-age peers. No matter the cause, it is imperative that a caring and perceptive adult help gifted learners break the cycle of underachievement in order to achieve their full potential.

### **Gifted students are happy, popular, and well adjusted in school**

Many gifted students flourish in their community and school environment. However, some gifted children differ in terms of their emotional and moral intensity, sensitivity to expectations and feelings, perfectionism, and deep concerns about societal problems. Others do not share interests with their classmates, resulting in isolation or being labeled unfavorably as a “nerd.” Because of these difficulties, the school experience is one to be endured rather than celebrated. It is estimated that 20 to 25% of gifted children have social and emotional difficulties, about twice as many as in the general population of students.

### **Our district has a gifted and talented program: We have AP courses**

While AP classes offer rigorous, advanced coursework, they are not a gifted education program. The AP program is designed as college-level classes taught by high school teachers for students willing to work hard. The program is limited in its service to gifted and talented students in two major areas: First, classes are limited by the subjects offered at each school. Second, AP classes are typically only offered in high school and preference is given to 11th and 12th grade students. AP classes are designed for the students to pass the AP test, not for students to dive deep into areas of interest and across disciplines. While AP classes are rigorous, they do not replace a true gifted program.

### **This child can't be gifted, she has a disability**

Some gifted students also have learning or other disabilities. These “twice-exceptional” students often go undetected in regular classrooms because their disability and gifts mask each other, making them appear “average.” Other twice-exceptional students are identified as having a learning disability and as a result, are not considered for gifted services. In both cases, it is important to focus on the students' abilities and allow them to have challenging curricula in addition to receiving help for their learning disability.

### **Gifted education requires an abundance of resources**

Offering gifted education services does not need to break the bank. A fully developed gifted education program can look overwhelming in its scope and complexity. However, beginning a program requires little more than an acknowledgement by district and community personnel that gifted students need something different, a commitment to provide appropriate curriculum and instruction, and teacher training in identification and gifted education strategies. Best practices for gifted programming, are very low cost or no cost to implement, and with the push for schools to be more tech savvy, using online resources is almost seamless.

### **Gifted and Talented means the same thing**

Not necessarily. There is no rule that states that a child who is capable of scoring to the high ninety percentiles on group achievement testing **must** be considered gifted. We must remember that achievement tests like the Metropolitan Achievement Tests are "Grade Level Testing". Such a child is most definitely Academically Talented. But further individualized IQ and out of level academic testing must be given before we can define that child as "**Gifted**". At the same time, there is no rule that states a child identified as gifted should be "**Achieving**" to high standards in the classroom. This type of stereotyping can do serious and irreversible damage to both groups. **ANY** child can benefit from enrichment. Academically Talented Children can benefit from Honors (Grade Level) Classes. Intellectually Gifted children need a differentiated curriculum and possibly even a different environment or acceleration.

### **They need to go through school with children their own age**

Where it's true that children need to play and interact socially with other children they do not necessarily need to learn with other children their age, especially in the case of a highly gifted child who may have a chronological age of six, a mental age of 11 and who has been reading since the age of two. To put that child in a reading class with other six year olds who are just learning to read is sheer torture for that child.

### **Giftedness is something to be jealous of**

More often than not gifted children can feel isolated and misunderstood. They often have different interests than other children their age, and sometimes even adult tastes in music, clothing, reading material and food. These differences can cause other children to shun them or even verbally or physically abuse them. Even when these differences do not result in negative reactions from age mates, not having others to share their interests with can erode their sense of self-worth and belonging. While having high potential has true and wonderful benefits, like most things in life, there is a flip side.

### **There is no need to identify gifted students in the early grades**

Many school districts do not begin identifying gifted and talented students until third grade. There is a belief among some educators that giftedness cannot be properly identified in the early grades. However, the [National Association for Gifted Children](#) programming standards start with prekindergarten. The group's early childhood network position paper says that "providing engaging, responsive learning environments ... benefit all children, including young gifted children."

### **Gifted students are a homogeneous group, all high achievers**

One of the hallmarks of gifted children is that they are asynchronous in their development. Gifted children are as different from each other as they are from other students. For many reasons... motivation, boredom, learning disabilities, etc. Gifted children do not always perform well in the classroom. In fact, the **more** gifted a child is the **less** likely they are to be high classroom performers.

### **Gifted students have fewer problems than others because their intelligence and abilities somehow provide them with a charmed life**

Asynchronous development combined with the innate traits of intensity and feelings of never quite fitting in, can make the life of gifted students very difficult at times. Because gifted individuals are able to see things that others either do not see or do not concern themselves with, their inner experience can be tumultuous. Sometimes, these inner conflicts are expressed as unwelcome behaviors that do not make sense to those around the student.

### **Gifted children are easy to raise and a welcome addition to any classroom**

Raising and teaching gifted children is both a joy and a challenge. The asynchronous nature of gifted children makes it so the adults around them are dealing with many ages at once. Combined with the innate intensity that accompanies giftedness, raising and teaching gifted children a constant challenge for both teachers and parents alike.