

## The Myths about Gifted Children and Their Education

Summarized from several publications of  
The National Association for Gifted Children

### Characteristics

- ***All children are gifted***—While all children are special and deserving, not all children have exceptional academic gifts that require additional or different support in school. Interestingly, most people readily accept that there are gifted children in performing arts or athletics whose talents are so far above those of others their age that they require additional or different training or coaching.
- ***Gifted are homogeneous***—There is no more varied group of young people than the diverse group known as gifted children in ability/aptitude, achievement, background, culture and identity, temperament, effort and motivation, interests, creativity, and learning styles. Some commonalities can be identified, but children vary in their patterns of talents and the extent that each possesses the characteristics listed above; they do not all demonstrate every trait.
- ***The gifted population (based on IQ) constitutes 3-5% of the general population***—Giftedness has been defined in different ways by different theorists (e.g., above-average ability, productiveness, and motivation), not merely by standard deviation above mean IQ. A better identification process considers a child's entire profile, not one test with cut-scores. Identification should not be about "winners" and "losers," but about demonstrated need for differentiated services.
- ***Giftedness remains the same in the person over time and experiences***—Demonstration of gifted characteristics depends on the type of assessment used, age of student (adolescents often try to hide their talents), and whether they have had opportunities to develop their potential.
- ***That child can't be gifted because he/she doesn't make top grades or he/she has a disability***—Underachievement and twice-exceptionality (gifted with learning disabilities, physical disabilities, sensory-processing difficulties, or autism) are present in gifted populations. The causes of underachievement are many including the desire to hide abilities to fit in with same-age peers, perfectionism and fear of failure, being under-challenged in the classroom, and personal qualities. The disability of a twice-exceptional child may make gifted identification difficult; the reverse is also true, the giftedness may cover-up and compensate for the disability.
- ***High IQ and creativity go together***—Beyond an average IQ, there is no correlation between creativity and intellect. Students may be gifted in both or in either only. The assessment of creativity should not ask, "How creative are you?" but "How are you creative?"
- ***Gifted kids are well-adjusted and don't face problems or challenges***—While the majority of gifted children do fine, they are children first with the same issues as other children. It is estimated that 25% of gifted children (twice as many as the general population) experience special social and emotional issues connected with their giftedness such as the feeling of isolation at being different or called a "nerd," intensive sensitivities, and anxiety over high expectations.

## Educational Services

- ***Gifted programs are elitist***—The gifted identification is not about status, it is about a student's need. These needs are as real and appropriate as providing music education for students with those talents.
- ***Gifted students don't need help, they are already achieving and will do fine on their own***—Every child deserves to learn something new every day and to experience instruction for their intellectual growth. The potential of gifted students will not be realized without opportunities for development.
- ***Differentiation in the regular classroom is sufficient***—Seldom does a regular classroom teacher have the training, time, skill, and materials to differentiate adequately. A differentiated curriculum for the gifted includes added dimensions of depth and complexity beyond just levels of content (and this enrichment is usually lacking in even the extension activities provided in regular curricular materials). Gifted students also have intellectual and social-emotional needs to interact with a sufficient number of cognitive-peers.
- ***Benchmark and standardized tests are synonymous with rigor and difficulty***—These tests do not assess problem-solving, creative thinking, logical reasoning and evaluation, and productive thinking. Test items are designed to be grade-appropriate, and gifted students are above grade-level in performance.
- ***Gifted students make everyone else in the class smarter by providing a role model or challenge***—In reality, average and below-average students do not look to the gifted as role models. They are more likely to model their behavior on students with similar capabilities who are performing well. Seeing a student at a similar performance level succeed motivates students because they view the achievement as possible for themselves.
- ***There is a single curriculum for the gifted***—Because of the varying degrees of giftedness, the level of scaffolding support needed by such groups as low-SES and limited English proficient students, and the areas in which these talents and interests are demonstrated, an ideal program individualizes services to meet the needs of each child rather than trying to find a best-fit for the whole group. A continuum of services with a variety of options is needed. Limited educational funding prevents a realization of the ideal.
- ***Acceleration is socially harmful for the gifted***—There are multiple acceleration options, only one of which is whole grade acceleration. Gifted students usually relate better to their intellectual peers than to their age peers. The evidence overwhelmingly supports acceleration options as meeting both the academic and social-emotional needs of gifted students.
- ***Pull-out or "patch-on" services are sufficient***—Students are not gifted for only the hours that they are in a pull-out or enrichment session. The ideal is an integrated system between gifted education and the regular classroom that vertically aligns development of understanding, skills, and dispositions.