

Why Are Gifted Programs Needed?

Gifted and talented students and those with high abilities need gifted education programs that will challenge them in regular classroom settings and enrichment and accelerated programs to enable them to make continuous progress in school.

- According to one report on high-achieving students, more than 7 in 10 teachers of these students surveyed noted that their brightest students were not challenged or given a chance to “thrive” in their classrooms. [1] Additionally, gifted students need gifted programming in many cases because the “general education program is not yet ready to meet the needs of gifted students” (p. 9) due to lack of general educators’ training in gifted education and the pressure classroom teachers face to raise the performance of their struggling students. [2]
- It’s more than just giving students a challenge in classrooms: Gifted programming positively influences students’ futures. Several longitudinal studies have shown that gifted programs have a positive effect on students’ post-secondary plans. For example, studies found that 320 gifted students identified during adolescence who received services through the secondary level pursued doctoral degrees at more than 50X the base rate expectations. [3] In a follow-up report on the same study participants at age 38, 203 participants, or 63%, reported holding advanced terminal degrees (master’s and above). Of these, 142 (44%) held doctoral degrees and 8 of these 142 had more than one doctoral degree. As a benchmark for this accomplishment, the authors of this study compared these rates to the general U.S. population, noting that only approximately 2% of the general population held a doctoral degree according to the 2010 U.S. Census. [4]
- Additionally, in a study looking at gifted students who participated in talent development through competitions, the researchers reported a long-term impact on these students’ postsecondary achievements, with 52% of the 345 students who participated having earned doctoral degrees. [5]
- Further benefits of gifted programs have been shown to include that students who had participated in gifted programs maintained their interests over time and stayed involved in creative productive work after they finished college and graduate school. [6]
- A sample of 2,409 intellectually talented adolescents (top 1%) who were assessed on the SAT by age 13, and provided services through a talent search program, was tracked longitudinally for more than 25 years. Their creative accomplishments, with particular emphasis on literary achievement and scientific-technical innovation, were examined and results showed that distinct ability patterns identified by age 13 foreshadowed creative accomplishments in middle age. Among the sample, participants had earned 817 patents and published 93 books, one had been awarded the Fields Medal in mathematics, and another had won the John Bates Clark Medal for the most outstanding economist under 40. [7]

¹ Loveless, T., Farkas, S., & Duffett, A. (2008). *High-achieving students in the era of NCLB*. Washington, DC: Thomas B. Fordham Institute.

² Hertberg-Davis, H. L., & Callahan, C. M. (2013). Introduction. In H. L. Hertberg-Davis & C. M. Callahan (Eds.), *Fundamentals of gifted education* (pp. 1–10). New York, NY: Routledge.

³ Lubinski, D., Webb, R. M., Morelock, M. J., & Benbow, C. P. (2001). Top 1 in 10,000: A 10 year follow-up of the profoundly gifted. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 4*, 718–729.

⁴ Kell, H. J., Lubinski, D., & Benbow, C. P. (2013). Who rises to the top? Early indicators. *Psychological Science, 24*, 648–659.

⁵ Campbell, J. R., & Walberg, H. J. (2011). Olympiad studies: Competitions provide alternatives to developing talents that serve national interests. *Roepers Review, 33*, 8–17.

⁶ Westberg, K. L. (1999, Summer). What happens to young, creative producers? NAGC: *Creativity and Curriculum Division Newsletter, 3*, 13–16.

⁷ Park, G., Lubinski, D., & Benbow, C. P. (2007) Contrasting intellectual patterns predict creativity in the arts and sciences: Tracking intellectually precocious youth over 25 years. *Psychological Science, 18*, 948–995.

Gifted children vary in their abilities and often their patterns of growth differ from their age peers.

When the social, emotional, physical, intellectual, and creative aspects of a person develop on a trajectory that is outside of norms, and at an uneven rate, it is described as **asynchronous development**.

Research shows that some gifted and talented children develop asynchronously. In fact, for one group of psychologists, educators, and parents (Columbus Group), asynchronous development is central to their definition of giftedness. They believe that giftedness is based on the inner experiences of the individual combined with advanced cognitive development.

Asynchrony can be demonstrated in a variety of ways. For example:

A 6-year-old child with a 9-year-old mind wants to draw and write like a 9-year-old, but his motor coordination is age appropriate.

A 5-year-old girl may be reading at an 8th grade level, but she is at grade level in math.

A young gifted child may cognitively understand difficult concepts such as death and social justice, but may not have the life experience to handle these concepts.

Asynchrony implies greater complexity. And, these qualitatively different experiences may occur in all cultures, ethnic groups, and segments of society.

KEY CONCEPTS **Increased Asynchrony.** As levels of giftedness increase, asynchrony may be more pronounced and social relationships may become more problematic. **Progressive Development.** The discrepancy between mental age and chronological age is progressive. A 6-year-old with a 9-year-old mind will become a 12-year-old with an 18-year-old mind. **Anxiety.** When a child realizes he is out of sync from his age mates, he may experience fear, anxiety, or depression. **Peers.** It's essential that gifted children spend time with like-minded age peers as well as like-minded "idea peers." Varied groups of friends are essential to meet children's needs at different levels of growth. **Perfectionism.** Children may experience intense frustration when their hands and feet cannot keep up with the visions of their more advanced minds. **Acceleration.** Research supports that acceleration is one way to challenge bright students. Age, size, and perceived maturity should not be a barrier to screen for possible acceleration; immature behaviors used as a coping strategy to "fit in" often disappear when the child is placed in the right environment with cognitive peers. **Twice-Exceptionalities.** The most asynchronous gifted learners are often those with learning disabilities, commonly referred to as twice-exceptional or 2E learners. This combination requires additional support at home and at school. **Age-Appropriate Expectations.** Adults must continually remind themselves that gifted children are still children. It's important to have age-appropriate expectations.

SOME BEGINNING STRATEGIES Focus on your child's strengths.

Help your child and others to: understand the meaning of being gifted, know the challenges that accompany asynchronous development, and set realistic expectations.

Explore and teach strategies to address the misunderstandings and stress that come from being out of sync with others—such as mindfulness, self-advocacy, and mind-body tools (yoga or martial arts). Find multiple peer groups for your child. One group may include those close in cognitive ability and another may include those with similar interests. A mental age match is sometimes more essential than a chronological age match.

Bibliotherapy: Have your child read books with main characters who also have unique abilities and uneven development.

Connect with other parents who are experiencing similar challenges for camaraderie and support. Join a parent support group or start your own. Help educators understand what you notice at home regarding the asynchronous development of your child. Keep educators informed when you see your child soar or if you feel your child is lagging behind.

