

Identifying the Gifted and Talented

by Care McCray-Lengel

As classes get underway this fall, schools, parents, and teachers are all asking, “Is this child gifted?” Arizona State mandate requires that districts identify the gifted children they serve and provide gifted services, but identification can be confusing.

For the School or District: A variety of assessment instruments are available. Each district must select among tests that best meet the needs of its students. The Cognitive Abilities Test (CogAT) may be one of the most common gifted identification instruments used in Arizona because it is relatively inexpensive, easy to give, and quick to score. However, this test is primarily language-based, a disadvantage for a student gifted in a non-verbal ways. Many other tests are available and may be used in tandem. The list of Arizona State approved tests with descriptions is available at www.ADE.AZ.gov/asd/gifted. Once identified, the gifted specialist should meet with the student and family to create an individual learning plan that best meets the gifted student’s needs. Check NAGC.org for “Guiding Principles of Student Identification” to enhance any district’s service of all students.

For the Parent: Parents may not be the best source to accurately assess their own child’s extraordinary capabilities, but parents do know their own kids. This is my own test: “Does this child love learning? Does he create and express patterns in fast or unusual ways?” Gifted children intuit the patterns in their areas of giftedness. If a child demonstrates exceptional pattern-creation tendencies, he should be tested. If a child was previously identified as “gifted” using any test, request gifted services. Be sure to provide all previous paperwork. Giftedness isn’t about performance; the issue isn’t grades but ability. Gifted or not, every parent can enhance a child’s natural abilities by offering broad exposure to many kinds of experiences. The more any child experiences learning about the world, the more that child will grow mental connections about the world. Go to NAGC.org for articles on giftedness and determining if your child is gifted.

For Teachers: A teacher can do much to engage the gifted student, but encouraging engagement works for all students. First though, know who the gifted students in class are. Ask the office. Observe the students. Check who is reading, doodling, talking, texting, or just staring into nothingness but still seems to know all the answers. That child may be gifted! So might be the child who resists doing homework but performs well on tests, the student who challenges the teacher’s intellect, and the one who always masters tasks before the teacher is through assigning them. For the gifted child, provide a more thought-provoking or self-directed component to class objectives. Trust students to learn for themselves, and plan *differentiated* instruction and assessments that benefit the teacher and all students. Check ASCD.org for more.

While a relatively small percentage of all children are going to be identified as gifted, educational experiences that benefit the gifted child benefit all children. That’s why identifying a child as gifted is only the first step.