

A Showcase
of the Needs of a
Specialized Middle School
Gifted Program

A series of horizontal stripes in various colors including yellow, green, blue, dark blue, orange, red, white, and light green, located at the bottom of the page.

Rebekah A. West Keur M.Ed.

Middle School Gifted Specialist
Sunrise Middle School
Paradise Valley School District
rwestkeur@pvschools.net



Voices From a Gifted Middle School

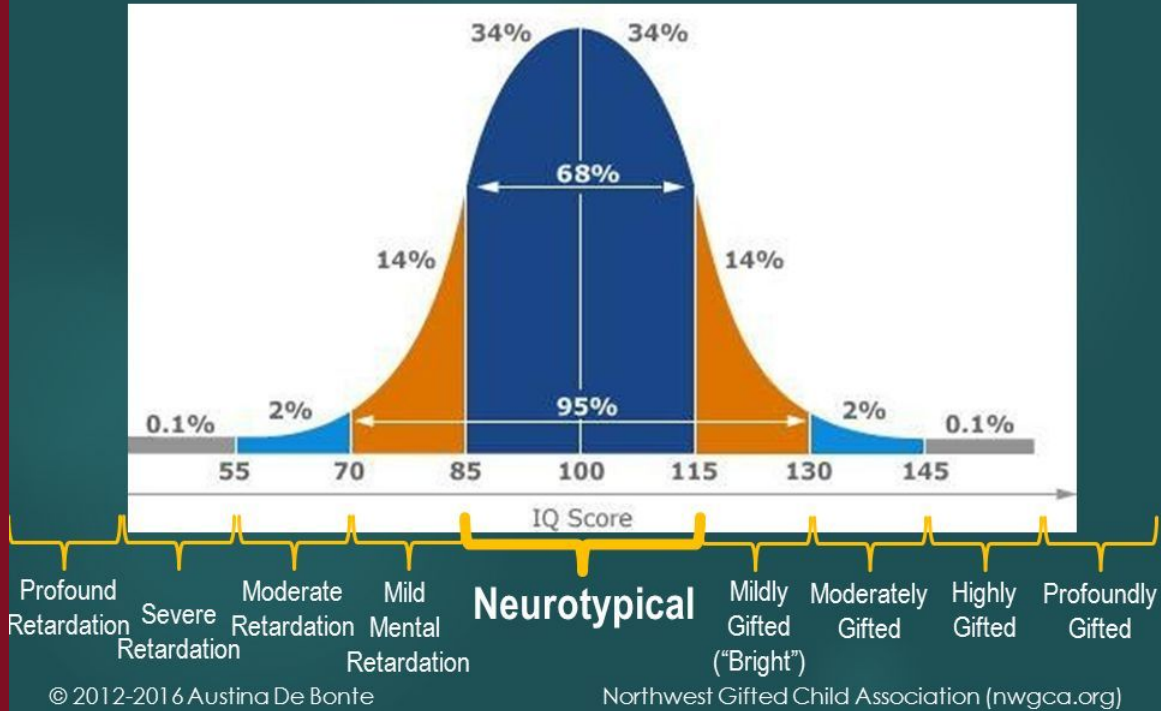
What does gifted mean?

The current definition of gifted, located in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, is:

Students, children, or youth who give evidence of high achievement capability in areas such as intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership capacity, or in specific academic fields, and who need services and activities not ordinarily provided by the school in order to fully develop those capabilities.

(“Title IX - General Provisions.”)

“The Bell Curve”



Why Gifted Education?

There are different opinions about how IQ scores relate to levels of giftedness and the prevalence of these scores in the population.

You can find a discussion about this topic on Hoagies' Gifted Education Page website at:
http://www.hoagiesgifted.org/highly_profoundly.htm

Why Gifted Education?

Yet it is important that we note that gifted students are not a homogenous group any more than a school of students would be. There is still a standard deviation within gifted populations.

Table 1: IQ and levels of giftedness (Gross, 2000)

Level of giftedness	IQ range	Prevalence
Mildly	115 – 129	> 1:40
Moderately	130 – 144	1:40 - 1:1000
Highly	145 – 159	1:1000 - 1: 10 000
Exceptionally	160 - 179	1:10 000 - 1:1 million
Profoundly	180 +	< 1:1million

<http://www.curriculumsupport.education.nsw.gov.au/policies/gats/assets/pdf/plk12gtlvls.pdf>

Why Gifted Education?

“In order for there to be a specialized education program, gifted students also must demonstrate the need for special programs and services that will help them pursue their interest in their area or areas of giftedness. Essentially the traditional learning environment does not meet their learning needs.”

(“FAQs about Gifted Education.”).

How Gifted Students Learn Differently

There are many ways in which gifted students learn differently from their age level non-gifted peers, and thus their needs must be addressed accordingly.

How Gifted Students Learn Differently

“Gifted students learn new material much faster than their peers. They process information similar to the way adults do it by capitalizing on patterns of information.”

(Oak Crest)

How Gifted Students Learn Differently

“Gifted children learn earlier than their peers. Research work with children above 180 IQ showed that these children developed much earlier than other children in talking, reading, and imagination.”

(Oak Crest)

How Gifted Students Learn Differently

“They have better memories and remember more of what they learn. This means they need a little time to review if any.”

(Oak Crest)

How Gifted Students Learn Differently

“They have an ability to think abstractly and to grasp concepts much better than their peers. They have exceptional problem-finding abilities and can conceive higher-order relations.”

(Oak Crest)

How Gifted Students Learn Differently

“They can focus intensely on subjects and become highly motivated to learn more about them while excluding other subjects completely.”

(Oak Crest)

How Gifted Students Learn Differently

“They are very aware of their surroundings and can absorb many stimuli while focusing on a given task.”

(Oak Crest)

How Gifted Students Learn Differently

“Gifted children have more intellectual curiosity and fascination with ideas and words.”

(Oak Crest)

How Gifted Students Learn Differently

“They have a need for precision and have the ability to perceive many sides of a question using metaphorical thinking and visualization of models and systems. They have logical imperatives related to their complex thought patterns that make them expect the world to make sense. This leads them to argue extensively, correct errors, and strive for precision of thought in every endeavor.”

(Oak Crest)

How Gifted Students Learn Differently

“They have an early moral concern for others and for society.” This moral concern leaves them passionate about the world around them, often they will be student activists. This also exhibits itself in the concept of fairness and equality.

(Oak Crest)

How Gifted Students Learn Differently

“ Gifted children have a high level of metacognitive knowledge and awareness. They think about their own ways of knowing, remembering, and understanding. They have insights that non-gifted children do not have. Superior metacognitive ability is considered an essential component of giftedness. ”

(Oak Crest)

How Gifted Students Learn Differently

“They have a greater capacity for empathy with another. This usually means that one projects oneself into another’s persona and determines what the other person is feeling. But it also means the ability to project oneself into something. Visual artists project themselves onto the canvas when they paint and musicians project themselves into their music.”

(Oak Crest)

*Giftedness is asynchronous development
in which advanced cognitive abilities
and heightened intensity combine
to create experiences and awareness
that are qualitatively different from the norm.*

This asynchrony increases with higher intellectual capacity.

*The uniqueness of the gifted renders them particularly vulnerable
and requires modifications in parenting, teaching, and counseling
in order to develop optimally.*

(Columbus Group, 1991)

How Gifted Students Learn Differently

Essentially, gifted students process information, synthesize, and express information differently; because of this needs are different.

However, they are still children with their prefrontal cortex changing and adapting at the level of their age level peers or at times, below this level. This leads to an exhibition of their asynchronous development.

Why Gifted Education?

“The justification for gifted education is simple: Academically advanced children should be given work at their speed and level, both to nurture their talents and prevent them from becoming bored and disruptive in class.”

Everything else--from how to define and identify gifted students, particularly those from traditionally underrepresented groups, to how to serve them and nurture their long-term success--almost all decisions about gifted education are made at the state and local level.

(Sparks)

Mandates

“Where special education has a federal mandate--you must meet these students' needs--we don't have that,’ said Jill Adelson, a research scientist at Duke University Talent Identification Program and the editor of the journal Gifted Child Quarterly. ‘We don't even have a common definition across states of what gifted education is’.”

(Sparks)

Arizona Mandates

Gifted and advanced learners **make up approximately 8% of Arizona's public school population.** Arizona law requires that all public school districts must both identify gifted learners and provide appropriate educational programs and services for gifted learners. However, the law does not prescribe the models that district must use to serve their gifted learners.

(“About Gifted Education.”)

Arizona Mandates: Program

Title 15 - Education Chapter 7 Article 4.1 Gifted Education for Gifted Children. 4.1.15-779.

1. "Gifted education" means appropriate academic course offerings and services that are required to provide an educational program that is an integral part of the regular school day and that is commensurate with the academic abilities and potential of a gifted pupil.

(“About Gifted Education.”)

Arizona Mandates: Identification

TITLE 7. EDUCATION CHAPTER 2. STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION Supp. 06-1 Authority: A.R.S. § 15-201 et seq. ARTICLE 3. CURRICULUM REQUIREMENTS AND SPECIAL PROGRAMS R7-2-406. Gifted Education Programs and Services

1. Procedures for identification and placement of students to be placed in gifted programs. a. Students shall be served who score at or above the 97th percentile on national norms in any one of three areas - verbal, nonverbal, or quantitative reasoning - on any test from the State Board approved list. Students who score below the 97th percentile also may be served.

<https://cms.azed.gov/home/GetDocumentFile?id=587ebff3aadebe0e04bed518>

(“About Gifted Education.”)

Gifted Education Policy

Although many school districts recognize that gifted and talented students are individuals with unique needs, state laws, local policies, and available funding vary widely, resulting in disparity of services between school districts and varying protection for gifted and talented students under the law.

(“FAQs about Gifted Education.”)

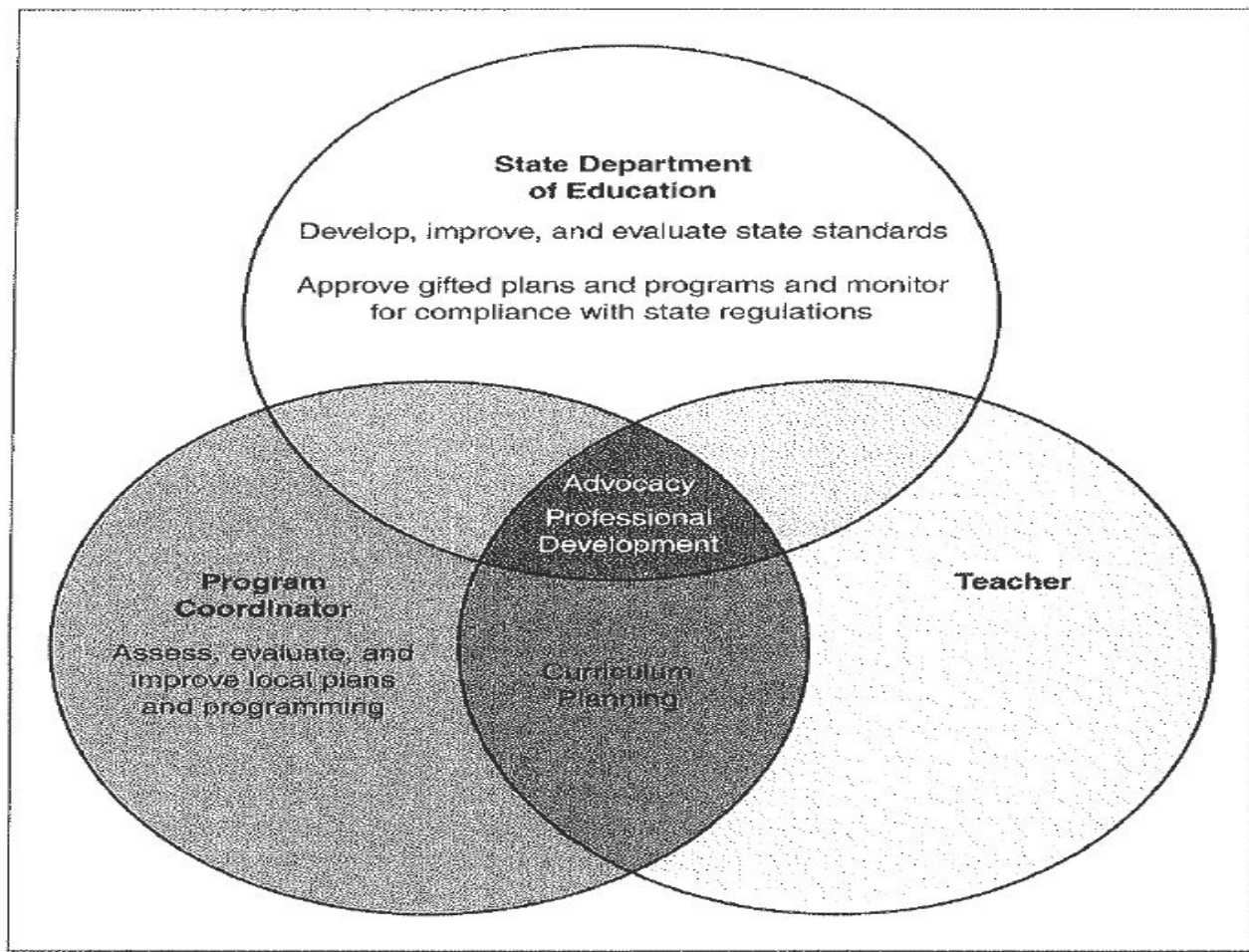
Gifted Education Policy

In many instances, gifted students must rely on a parent advocate, an innovative teacher, or an innovative school administrator to ensure that they are adequately challenged in the classroom.

So how do administrators, teachers, and parents know that their gifted students are receiving the education they need?

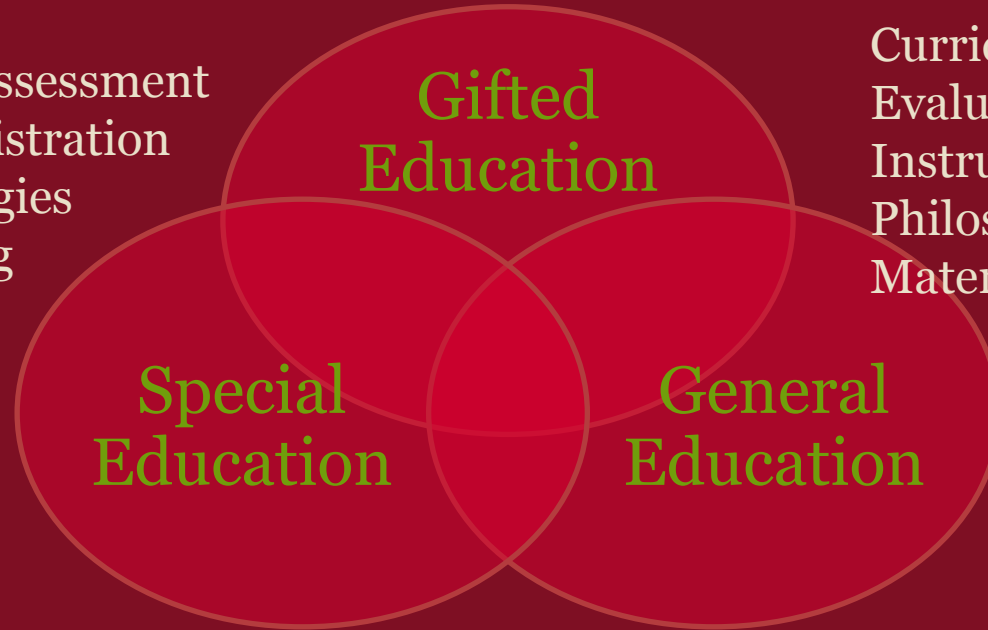
The Six Gifted Education Programming Standards

- Learning and Development
- Assessment
- Curriculum Planning & Instruction
- Learning Environments
- Programming
- Professional Development



Key Linkages of Special Education and General Education in Program Development for the Gifted

Identification/Assessment
Program Administration
Grouping Strategies
Teacher Training
Advocacy



Curriculum
Evaluation
Instructional Processes
Philosophy & Goals
Materials/Resources

Identification

“Testing provides an objective and systematic way for identifying gifted children. Ability and achievement tests provide numbers or scores to describe a student's performance in relation to others. Tests are often used as benchmark requirements for entrance into specific programs or if a discrepancy in learning is suspected. However, formal assessments are only one tool in determining giftedness. Tests should be used in conjunction with subjective assessment tools.”

(“Tests & Assessments.”)

Identification: Recommendation for testing

Most districts have multiple ways a student can be recommended for testing and often offer testing once or twice a year. Other districts offer blanket testing in grades 2 and 5. You would need to check with your local district to determine when they administer gifted tests and how to sign' up for your child to be tested.

Some avenues that teachers and parents could use to determine if a child should be tested are Observation logs, such as Kingore Observation Inventory, performance indicators characteristic checklists, parent/teacher surveys and interviews, observations, or portfolios. Again, you would want to contact your district's gifted services department to inquire about future testing,

However, most districts will accept students who have passed a district approved gifted test that was administered through a reputable and reliable source meeting the district requirement thresholds.

Identification: Testing

Non-Verbal: measures reasoning and problem solving with patterns and relationships, pictorial analogies, and categories

Verbal: measures verbal aptitude, word knowledge and concepts, facility with language, verbal reasoning, and analogies.

Quantitative: measures mathematical reasoning and problem solving, numerical sequences and patterns, manipulation of mathematical concepts

Identification: Testing

Individual

- *Stanford Binet (L-M)*
- *Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children, 4th Edition.* Read NAGC position papers Use of the WISC-V in Gifted Education and the WISC-IV.
- Woodcock Johnson

Group

- CogAT
- Otis-Lennon
- Hemmon-Nelson
- Raven's Progressive Matrices
- Matrix Analogies Test

Nonverbal tests, such as the *Naglieri Nonverbal Ability Test* or the *Test of Nonverbal Intelligence*, may be more effective for students from culturally and linguistically different or low-income backgrounds to eliminate barriers.

Identification: Testing

“Assessments provide data points, but do not automatically guarantee placement in gifted programs. The majority of states do not require local education agencies to follow the same identification process, so program criteria is left to the district or individual school. Parents and administrators should work together in a positive and collaborative spirit to use test data as one of several measures for develop an appropriate educational strategy for gifted students.”

“Tests & Assessments.”

Programs, Testing, and Placement

The state has a variety of tests that it recommends that districts must select from for gifted testing purposes. However, it is at the discretion of each district to select the testing formats it will administer and accept and the placements that will be made in reference to the testing results.

As to programming NAGC recognizes that there is no “one perfect program” for teaching gifted students. Instead, the NAGC Pre-K-Grade 12 Gifted Programming Standards state that “a continuum of services must exist for gifted learners” at every level.

(“Tests & Assessments.”)

Programs, Testing, and Placement

What exactly does this mean?

Essentially, a “continuum of services” provides administrators, teachers, parents, and students with a menu of educational options that are respectful of individual student differences and mindful of classroom and community resources.

In most cases, the decisions about the range of services offered are made locally, and may include pull-out programs, advanced classes, varied grouping strategies, acceleration, differentiation of curriculum and instruction, dual enrollment, magnet schools, and specialized, self-contained schools (e.g., high schools for performing arts).

Bear in mind that some district practices (e.g., early entrance to kindergarten or dual enrollment in high school and college) are governed by state policy, which often supersedes local policies and practices.

(“FAQs about Gifted Education.”)

Programs, Testing, and Placement

This range of services can be organized in a variety of ways:

- **Accommodations in the regular classroom**
- **Part-time assignment to both regular and special classes**
- **Full-time grouping with students of similar abilities**
- **Acceleration or grade advancement**
- **Self-Contained**
- **Cluster grouping**
- **Honors**
- **Highly gifted**
- **Highly and Profoundly Gifted**
- **2E**
- **ELL**

Programs, Testing, and Placement

With this much variety, how does a parent know what is best for their child? What should a middle school gifted programs offer their students?

What Matters in Talent Development?

- Aptitude and predisposition
- Effort, learning, and practice
- Passion, persistence, and commitment
- Quality instruction and master teachers
- Models and mentors

(Brown)

In-School

Teachers

Counselors/Specialists/Staff

Administrators

Students

Parent Voices

“As a parent I want my gifted child to meet and exceed curriculum standards and reach their full potential. But equally important is what are they learning along the way as to being gifted and unique but also conforming to the world around them We need to be able to conform in any environment while still being true to self but respecting others.”

(Gifted Parent One)

Parent Voices

“ They are children first and gifted second. They are all different from one another, they are not all precocious they do not all learn at the same speed, and they are not all interested in the same things; assuming so is detrimental to the students and the classroom environment.”

(Gifted Parent Two)

Middle School Gifted Programming

- **Curriculum and Instruction**
- **Social and Emotional or Affective Education**
- **Challenge and Extracurricular**

Middle School Gifted Programming

Curriculum and Instruction

- **Classroom environment and teachers**
- **Subjects**
- **Pacing and implementation**
- **Assessment**
- **Focusing on the process and efforts of learning instead of the outcome**
- **Differentiation and Enrichment**

Curriculum and Instruction:

Classroom Environment and Teachers

- In middle school, the teacher needs to be fair and equitable in that in this stage of development the students are tuned into this- this can mean in grades, group work, and consequences.
- Students need to be able to trust the teacher and know that they are going to be understood and respected to get around the static of middle school -so they can then do their best work.

Curriculum and Instruction:

Classroom Environment and Teachers

- Teachers should demonstrate their own passion and love of learning teachers should encourage curiosity and creativity.
- Teachers should listen to the students whether it's regarding academics, behavior, and to personal issues, or personal interests; caring about the child shows that you care about them as a whole person which includes their learning.

Curriculum and Instruction:

Classroom Environment and Teachers

- Do not be afraid of the students, gifted kids can be intense they have big thoughts and large ideas and naturally operate at a different intellectual level than those around them, at times that can include their adults.
- Teachers should challenge the students pushing them further into their zone of proximal development, which is just outside of their comfort zone
- Gifted students need praise, therefore teachers should praise their efforts recognize their strengths, and encourage them to push themselves further.
- Praise their curiosity and then teach them the skills to find answers for themselves.

Curriculum and Instruction:

Classroom Environment and Teachers

- Gifted students often feel more comfortable talking with adults than what they do their age level peers therefore it is important that gifted teachers talk to their students on the same intellectual level trusting that the child will ask the teacher for clarification if they don't know the meaning of a word or need further explanation on the topic.
- On the other hand it is important that while gifted students do like discussing their intellectual passions at the level of an adult, they are still children.

Curriculum and Instruction:

Subjects

Science and its components are things they need to be explicitly taught. Often students coming into middle school do not have enough of a scientific background or base knowledge and therefore direct instruction and traditional method of learning need to be used.

However, science is important and should be taught at an advanced level once the students are ready, thought scaffolded insertion and include strategies that meet the needs of gifted students.

Curriculum and Instruction: Subjects

Gifted in a particular area does not mean that the student already has the knowledge of that particular area or that they like that particular area. The teacher still needs to teach and help the students fall in love with the subject.

Social Studies and history need to be taught and explored through multiple avenues including project and problem based learning, discussions, and engaging in authentic research and primary source documentation. Like science, however, they may not have a solid foundational background and therefore explicit instruction may be needed.

Curriculum and Instruction:

Subjects

- Repetition can be painful and if Mastery is the goal once Mastery has been demonstrated students should be permitted to move on.
- If a student demonstrates proficiency on a topic even if it's not in the way you expected, let them move on do not have them repeat work they already know how to do have them apply it instead, unless of course, there is justification for the process too. .

Curriculum and Instruction: Pacing and implementation

Pretest the students to determine what they already know, so you can use the results to plan appropriate instruction. If they passed the test have another test ready for them and keep testing them up or pushing them further until you figure out what they do not know so that you can plan what you need to teach.

Curriculum and Instruction:

Pacing and implementation

- It is not about going fast but actually teaching the students as they still need to learn.
- Rapid acceleration without ensuring understanding is not always good.
- Accelerate learning at the pace that matches the students but address learning gaps
- At times faster pacing is good but at other times going in depth is better.
- You need to ensure that learning is actually happening with each student.
- In-depth does not mean more busy work.

Curriculum and Instruction: Pacing and implementation

Gifted kids need to be taught. They need quality, scaffolded instruction just like any other child. That instruction may be at a much higher level or at a faster pace but they still need to be taught.

Curriculum and Instruction:

Focusing on the process and efforts of learning instead of the outcome

- Child directed lessons and go with the flow of ideas and be free to explore, but within parameters, with clear expectations, and understanding the purpose of their education and the objectives they are trying to reach.
- Open-ended assignments that allow them to incorporate their interest and abilities.
- Students need to actually learn, flexibility, choice, deep exploration, engaging, curious, hands on assignments which Foster intrinsic learning
- Freedom to be taught and explore and be prepared for the real world but also to be able to know and understand the foundation what they are applying and why it is relevant and to work through what might otherwise seem mundane.

Curriculum and Instruction:

Assessment: Learning Progress and Outcomes.

- Students with gifts and talents demonstrate advanced and complex learning as a result of using multiple, appropriate, and ongoing assessments
- Educators should use differentiated pre- and post- performance-based assessments to measure the progress of students with gifts and talents.
- Educators should use differentiated product-based assessments to measure the progress of students with gifts and talents.
- Educators use and interpret qualitative and quantitative assessment information to develop a profile of the strengths and weaknesses of each student with gifts and talents to plan appropriate intervention.
- However, educators also need to use off-level standardized assessments to measure the progress of students with gifts and talents.

Curriculum and Instruction: Differentiation and Enrichment

A never ending stream of independent research projects or enrichment projects that are intended to keep a child busy is a bad idea. Projects should foster the process of learning and should be used concurrently with other instructional methods such as choice, flexible grouping, opting or testing out.

Curriculum and Instruction: Differentiation and Enrichment

- Education should be integrated and differentiated, focusing on the Four C's: Creativity, Collaboration, Critical Thinking and Communication
- Go deeper than surface and this does not mean multiple worksheets; deeper is synthesis, analysis, deep understanding
- Enrichment should go hand in hand with learning. Enrichment being greater depth and breadth. Such as inquiry: project-based learning and problem-based learning.

Social and Emotional or Affective Education

- Gifted students have asynchronous development which means the giftedness comes with both positive and not so positive traits at times the positive traits hide the challenges but at other times, it is the challenges that the teachers focus on.
- Giftedness does not mean that they will always succeed, not struggle, will get everything, understand everything, and be well behaved, high achieving people pleasing children
- Gifted students need help recognizing that they do not need to be perfect, as gifted kids struggle in areas too. Giftedness can come with baggage: perfectionism, existential depression or just a few

Social and Emotional or Affective Education

- Although gifted students can process information like adults, they have other issues that interfere with the effectiveness of that processing that adults don't have to worry about. Their cognitive development proceeds faster than their chronological, social, moral and emotional development.
- All these developmental traits happen asynchronously at different intervals for different students. Gifted students may be able to think abstractly and form hypotheses but at the same time have problems in organizing material or presenting an argument. This presents unique challenges for teachers, parents, and school counselors.



Social and Emotional or Affective Education

- Gifted students have trouble with material that non-gifted students find easy. They see so many possible answers to questions that they don't know how to respond. If asked "What does a doctor do?" they can think of so many kinds of doctors that they can't pick one. They have a higher level of analysis and integration than is required.
- Being understood is important while being misunderstood can be tragic for the child's development. Not working can be shutting down, defiance, not knowing where to start or what to do next, or having too much in their minds that they cannot seem to short their minds off and transition to this next task.
-

Social and Emotional or Affective Education

- Movement helps them think and create- it is normal. It could be tedium, or ADHD, but often it is just a kid being a kid
- They can become frustrated because their thoughts move quicker than their abilities to write or type this can exhibit themselves fast-talking being extra fidgety being off task talking out of turn
- They can also can be sloppy, hasty, or unorganized and most need help with executive functioning.



Social and Emotional or Affective Education

- They still need clear expectations and direction.
- Gifted students need to know what to expect and need structure and clear expectations. Consistency and structure helps them to overcome the middle school brain of social pressures, hormones, and stress.
- Social skills need to be taught:
 - How do you talk to others who do not think like you?
 - How do we respect our differences?
 - How do we listen to other perspectives?
 - Conformity, tolerance, patience, and respect must be modeled, explained, and practiced.



Social and Emotional or Affective Education

- External and internal variables:
 - External- societal pressures, inadvertent parent pressures - elitist superiority complex, do not force them to live the dream and you live vicariously through them. Is the students persecution based on a parental opinion.
 - internal-Sometimes they will say they dislike something, it is too easy, or give an attitude but this is often it is difficult, they do not understand, or they dislike a personality, overwhelmed, freaked out to be with like minded people, or are not the smartest in the class, at times it could be tedium

Social and Emotional or Affective Education

- External and internal variables:
 - This pressure starts when they are babies, non verbal, toddlers, first show signs of giftedness- signs: - tantrums, anti-social behavior, different and unexpected play- what can you as parents do to help instead of harming students, as this can happen before you realize it, ways: unrealistic praise, expectations, pressures to be perfect- the students shut down in the face of adversity instead of rising up to meet the challenge



The Six Gifted Education Programming Standards

- Learning and Development
- Assessment
- Curriculum Planning & Instruction
- Learning Environments
- Programming
- Professional Development

Middle School Gifted Programming

Challenge and Extracurricular

- In middle school there may not always be interesting electives beyond a few selective ones at certain schools.
- School electives will vary as will clubs they offer.
- Students need challenge and extracurricular activities that meet their interest and their ability levels.
- Parents, propose to the school a club or speak to community education department and offer to lead an enrichment club.

Outside of School

Families/Communities

Supplemental Programs

Friends outside of
school

Questions



Bibliography

“About Gifted Education.” *Gifted Education About Gifted Education Comments*, Arizona Department of Education, 2019, <https://www.azed.gov/gifted-education/>.

Brown, Elissa. “Using the NAGC PreK-12 Standards to Improve Gifted Education Programs”. Rutgers University Conference. 18 November 2016.

“FAQs about Gifted Education.” *Frequently Asked Questions about Gifted Education | National Association for Gifted Children*, <https://www.nagc.org/resources-publications/resources/frequently-asked-questions-about-gifted-education>.

Gifted Parent One. Personal Interview. 4 September 2019

Gifted Parent Two. Personal Interview. 6 September 2019

Lovecky, D. V. “Exceptionally Gifted Children: Different Minds.” *Davidson Institute for Talent Development*, Roper Review, Dec. 1994, <http://www.davidsongifted.org/Search-Database/entry/A10152>.

Oak Crest Academy. “Gifted Students Learn Differently in These 11 Ways - Oak Crest.” *Oak Crest Academy*, 29 Dec. 2018, <https://oakcrestacademy.org/gifted-students-learn-differently/>.

Sparks, Sarah D. “4 Ways Schools Help or Hinder Gifted Students.” *Education Week*, 16 Apr. 2019, <https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2019/04/17/gifted-education-four-studies-you-should-know.html>.

“Tests & Assessments.” *Tests & Assessments | National Association for Gifted Children*, <https://www.nagc.org/resources-publications/gifted-education-practices/identification/tests-assessments>.

“Title IX - General Provisions.” *Home*, 19 Dec. 2005, <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/pg107.html>