

# Indiana Association for the Gifted

Parent Guide To High Ability Education and  
Advocacy



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# **Understanding and Identifying Your High Ability Child**

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# What is “Gifted” or “High Ability”?

Just as every individual is unique and exhibits his or her own personality, “giftedness” or “high ability” characteristics present themselves differently in every child. A high ability child might be a motivated high-achiever, but it is equally possible that the child’s abilities might not even be evident at first glance. A high ability student may be one who has strengths in particular academic areas but is average (or struggles) in others. In order to identify the many different types of giftedness beyond the precocious learner, we need to recognize giftedness across a broad spectrum of children with varying abilities, which may include: twice-exceptional students who are high ability learners but are also learning disabled; kids whose abilities may be masked by socio-economic factors; or gifted under-achievers who have fallen into behavioral patterns because they have not been sufficiently stimulated and challenged. While it is difficult to identify specifically what giftedness is, or even to define it in a single statement, there are a handful of perspectives that may be used to gain a better overall understanding of the concept, including:

*The term gifted and talented student means children and youths who give evidence of higher performance capability in such areas as intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership capacity, or in specific academic fields, and who require services or activities not ordinarily provided by the schools in order to develop such capabilities fully.*

THE JACOB JAVITS GIFTED AND TALENTED STUDENTS EDUCATION ACT

*A gifted person is someone who shows, or has the potential for showing, an exceptional level of performance in one or more areas of expression.*

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR GIFTED CHILDREN

*The Indiana Code defines a student with high abilities as one who:*

- 1. performs at, or shows the potential for performing at, an outstanding level of accomplishment in at least one domain when compared to other students of the same age, experience, or environment; and:*
- 2. is characterized by exceptional gifts, talents, motivation, or interests*

INDIANA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

*Giftedness is asynchronous development in which advanced cognitive abilities and heightened intensity combine to create inner 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 for them to develop optimally.*

THE COLUMBUS GROUP

A student’s “giftedness” or “high ability” can affect a broad spectrum of his or her life (such as leadership skills or the ability to think creatively) but can also be very specific (such as a special aptitude in math or reading). The term “giftedness” refers in general to this spectrum of abilities with out being dependent on a single measure or index. It is generally recognized that approximately three million children in the United States, including a little more than 140,000 in Indiana, are considered high ability.

*continued...*

There are challenges involved with raising and educating these high ability children as their talents and idiosyncrasies may present themselves in many different ways. High ability students in a typical heterogeneous classroom (i.e. a classroom with a mix including high-ability and learning disabled students, but consisting mostly of “average” learners) might exhibit a higher performance capability and master subjects at a fraction of the time it takes the rest of their class. These students require specifically tailored instruction and benefit from being allowed to explore subjects in greater depth and complexity (rather than just being given “more” work) so that they are able to continue learning at an accelerated pace.

On the other hand, there may be a number of personal and/or socio-economic factors that could contribute to a high ability child exhibiting negative behaviors or not being the “best student” in class (see: Characteristics of High Ability Children on the following page). In such cases, specific strategies might be needed in order to nurture the child’s inherent talents. Remember, high ability learners include those who have “the potential for showing an exceptional level of performance” based on their innate advanced cognitive abilities. It is crucial that we provide a continuum of appropriate educational services—both in and out of the classroom—to encourage each and every child so that they may strive to reach that potential.

## High Ability vs. Gifted

Throughout this document you will notice both the terms “gifted” and “high ability” being used. When describing characteristics and services for students with higher intellectual capabilities, the state of Indiana now uses the term “high ability” almost exclusively when referring to these students. Therefore, this resource guide will attempt to utilize this phrase as often as is possible. To clarify, “high ability” and “gifted” are intended to have the same meaning throughout this document. There are simply ways in which the word “gifted” fits better into the content of the information given here, but every attempt will be made to apply the phrase “high ability” as often as possible. This is the term that is more likely to be currently used in Indiana school systems and, like the word “gifted”, applies to those whose academic abilities and potential are greater than those of their peers.

# Characteristics of High Ability Children

The characteristics of high ability children may lead to both positive and negative behaviors.

Characteristic	Positive Behavior	Negative Behavior
Learns rapidly/easily	Memorizes and masters basic facts quickly	Gets bored easily, resists drill, disturbs others, underachieves
Reads intensively	Reads, uses library on own	Neglects other responsibilities
Perfectionist	Exceptional accomplishments	Intolerant of mistakes, reluctant to try new things
Retains quantity of information	Ready recall and responses	Resists repetitions, "know it all"
Long attention span	Sticks with task of personal interest	Resists class routine, dislikes interruptions
Imaginative, curious, many interests	Asks questions, gets excited about ideas, takes risks	Goes on tangents, no follow-through, disorganized
Works independently	Creates and invents beyond assigned tasks	Refuses to work with others
Alert, observant	Recognizes problems	Impolitely corrects adults
Good sense of humor	Able to enjoy subtleties of thought	Plays cruel jokes or tricks on others
Comprehends, recognizes relationships	Able to solve problems alone	Interferes in the affairs of others, can be bossy
Aesthetic insight, awareness	Appreciation of the arts	Imposes personal values/ judgments on others
Highly verbal, extensive vocabulary	Fluent with words and numbers, leads peers in positive ways	Leads others into negative behaviors, monopolizes discussion
Individualistic, strong-willed	Asserts self and ideas, has small circle of friends, sense of own uniqueness	Stubborn in beliefs, inflexible in thinking
Self-motivated, self-sufficient	Requires minimum teachers direction or help	Aggressive, challenges authority
Prefers older peers	Wise beyond years	Isolated or misunderstood
Highly sensitive, passionate	Emphasizes fairness and morality, compassionate	Overreacts to situations
Views with a different perspective	Observes across boundaries, makes connections	Resists limitations and narrowly focused content

# Asynchronous Development

Another challenging aspect of raising high ability children is the asynchronous development they exhibit as they grow. While typical kids' intellectual, physical, and emotional development progresses at comparable rates (e.g., an average kindergartener will have comparable intellectual and physical abilities, as well as the emotional maturity, of his same-aged classmates), in high ability children we often find that development in these areas is out of sync, and they do not progress at the same rate.

For this reason, high ability children may demonstrate characteristics of many different-aged children at once. While chronologically they are eight years old, they may display the intellectual maturity of a fifteen-year-old when explaining and analyzing a complex math problem. At the same time, however, they may be barely able to ride a bike or may write illegibly with the fine motor skills of a five-year-old. And when asked to share a toy with a sibling, they may regress to the emotional maturity of a two-year-old.

It is this variability in behavior and perception that sometimes makes it difficult for high ability children to “fit in” with their surroundings, especially when so much of their environment is structured by chronological age— a benchmark for high ability children that may be the least relevant to their development. In the social arena, it is often hard for high ability kids to relate to same-aged peers because they are often well beyond their non-high ability age-mates intellectually (yet may lag behind

emotionally). Physical issues also arise, especially in boys, when their intellectual development outpaces their motor skills, and they can become frustrated by their body's inability to keep up with what their mind wants it to do. Parents need to recognize that high ability kids' social, emotional, and intellectual needs may not be satisfied by their same-aged peers, and they will likely need opportunities to interact with other high ability children, older children, or even adults.

These asynchronous developments can have a direct impact in the classroom as high ability students are often faced with frustrating situations they don't have the emotional maturity to handle. Children may act out when frustrated in school (for example, when they become bored from having to perform repetitive work they have already mastered), and they run the risk of being labeled a “behavior problem” if teachers don't recognize the mismatch between intellectual ability and emotional development. We need to recognize that advanced intellectual capacity is not necessarily synchronized with social or emotional maturity. The kindergartener who reads about black holes and the speed of light may be intellectually advanced, but the temper tantrums he throws should not be entirely unexpected because, after all, he is still only in kindergarten.

# Twice Exceptional Students

It is often taken for granted that high ability children are, as a group, students who will score high on intelligence tests and perform well in school. Yet increasingly there is recognition of high-ability children who also have conditions that interfere with their ability to learn (e.g., learning disabilities, AD/HD, processing difficulties, etc.). It is equally important that these twice-exceptional (2e) students have attention paid to both their extremes; they should have remediation for their weaknesses, as warranted, but there needs to be a focus on promoting their strengths and talents at the same time.

Appropriately addressing all of these children's needs happens far too infrequently, however. With all of the possible combinations of gifted abilities and learning disabilities, there is no cookie-cutter way to classify a twice-exceptional child. It is important to have these children assessed by a professional trained in both high ability and special education. Without identifying 2e students, we run the risk of not being able to recognize their exceptionalities, which may result in one of the following three scenarios:

~ A 2e student may be identified as high ability but seen as underperforming in school. In this case their giftedness may mask their disability to the point where it is only recognized when school becomes more rigorous and the child begins to fall behind.

~ Conversely, a child may be identified as learning disabled but the student's disability may instead mask their giftedness. In this instance the student never has the opportunity to excel in their area(s) of strength because they are never recognized and nurtured.

~ More often than not, however, a student with both exceptionalities of abilities and disabilities will find themselves languishing in the general classroom because their extremes mask each other to the extent that they appear to possess average academic aptitude.

Teachers may often misunderstand these students, because they can be intelligent and frustrating at the same time. They may see students as lazy, disruptive, or under-performing if they don't recognize the duality of the 2e child's extremes. For this reason, it is important for parents to advocate for their children and to make sure that they are not only identified appropriately, but that they also receive services in the classroom that appropriately address both their abilities and disabilities. As with any learning disabled (LD) student, twice-exceptional children should have an individualized education plan (IEP) that meets their particular needs, but they can also benefit from developing a specific support plan for each classroom. Accommodations may include preferential seating, allowing them to work or test in a quiet space, breaking assignments into segments, or allowing them extra time to complete their work. Twice-exceptional students, similar to all high ability students, also benefit from being allowed to work on Type III independent research projects in areas of their interests and strengths. Support strategies should be individualized for each child to ensure that their disabilities don't prevent them from taking full advantage of their equally exceptional strengths.

# Social and Emotional Needs of High Ability Children

Being high ability doesn't just mean that children are "smarter" than their peers. High ability children not only demonstrate a greater cognitive understanding of academic concepts, but they also exhibit a heightened awareness of their environment and surroundings. From an early age, they understand and internalize abstract concepts that do not directly impact them, which they process and translate into intense emotions and feelings.

Without experiencing something first hand, a high ability child may develop personalized fears based upon their observations. For example, they may see an injured professional athlete and may then refuse to engage in sports for fear of getting hurt themselves. Or a young child who has been exposed to news stories of war and bloodshed in a distant country may suddenly develop a fear for their own personal safety. Similarly, other emotions may manifest extreme behaviors due to the high ability child's greater empathy at an earlier age. A child who is passionate about animals and learns of a species' long-ago extinction may become depressed over the welfare of animals that haven't roamed the planet for hundreds of years.

This is not to say that high ability children are alone in making these connections, but they do tend to develop these emotions earlier and stronger than their non-high ability peers. And it is often this difference that separates high ability kids in social settings and can make them uncomfortable in same-aged environments. High ability children may not understand why their non-high ability classmates don't possess the same feelings they do and may disassociate from others who don't share their sympathies and compassions.

Conversely, appearing to be "different" than the rest of the class because of their academic or out-of-school interests can result in children being singled out, ostracized, or teased by other students. High ability children can feel alone in their environments without like-minded friends who share their same interests or passions. It is important to provide high ability children with environments where they can interact—socially and academically— with their emotional and intellectual peers, and this often does not equate with the same-aged settings that schools and other organizations tend to use as a model. High ability children frequently blossom in an atmosphere where they can interact instead with other high ability children, older children, or interested adults. It is not unusual to hear high ability children express how they finally felt comfortable with themselves after going to an academic summer camp for the first time and being with kids who are just like them.

It is precisely for this reason that we need to focus on these specific needs of high ability kids, for the very nature of who they are depends on their social and emotional well-being. High ability kids are inquisitive and driven learners because it is essential to who they are. For them, learning is an emotional experience. They don't just learn because they can... they want and need to learn. Knowledge is their passion and what excites them. In order to help them thrive, we must ensure that they are able to mature in a secure and supportive environment that nurtures their innate inquisitive nature.

# Identification in Indiana

Because there are many components to being high ability, it is very important that schools identify these learners as soon as possible. How does this process work in Indiana?

According to PL 221, Indiana schools are required to meet the needs of all learners, including those with high ability. Your child is entitled to a Free and Appropriate Public Education.

The following is an excerpt from the document, “Identifying Students With High Abilities In Indiana”, a publication of the Department of Education:

“Effective July 1, 2007, Indiana schools shall identify students with high ability in the general intellectual and specific academic domains and provide them with appropriately differentiated curriculum and instruction in core content areas, K-12 (refer to IC-20-36-2-2). Specific identification processes remain a local decision and will vary according to district size and demographics.

The Indiana Code defines a student with high abilities as one who:

- 1) performs at, or shows the potential for performing at, an outstanding level of accomplishment in at least one domain when compared to other students of the same age, experience, or environment; and:
- 2) is characterized by exceptional gifts, talents, motivation, or interests (IC 20-36-1-3).”

## Key Steps In Identifying

What should you look for to know if your child’s school is appropriately identifying high ability students?

~ Does the district have an Identification Plan in place? Check the school’s website or ask the principal or high ability coordinator.

~ Do identification and programming begin early? (Ideally, these should be in place for Kindergarteners.)

~ Do they use multi-faceted assessment? In other words, does the school rely on several sources of testing data when considering students? Are these assessments based on both ability and achievement as well as performance and/or behavior?

~ Is there a committee (rather than an individual) in place for the identification process?

~ Does the district allow nominations to the high ability program from a variety of sources? (e.g. parents, teachers, school personnel other than the child’s teacher, etc.)

~ Are teachers and parents informed as to the characteristics of being high ability?

~ Does the district continue identifying students throughout the school career?

~ Does the district allow for further testing for those who request it or for students who are considered “borderline” in terms of meeting the requirements for high ability programming?

# Evaluating a High Ability Program

If your school district has a high ability program in place this is obviously a significant step towards meeting your child's academic needs. However, you may want to consider some of the following questions which can help you evaluate the program and know if it's in line with best practices in high ability education.

- ◆ Once students are identified, how are they served?
- ◆ Are services provided only in core content areas or other areas as well?
- ◆ How often are services offered? (Once a week; once a day; all day?)
- ◆ Are there self-contained classrooms/honors sections for high ability students or are they pulled out?
- ◆ Are the teachers who work with high ability students specifically trained to work with this population? (Do they have licensure in high ability education or at least some separate training?)
- ◆ What type of curriculum is being used with high ability students? Are they expected to "go deeper" and use more critical thinking, or just do more work?
- ◆ Is pre-assessment a common tool used to determine needs and readiness?
- ◆ Are open-ended, student-directed activities a common part of the learning process?
- ◆ How is the high ability program evaluated within the school system?

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# **Academic Issues**

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# Myths about High Ability Students

Before we explore the academic issues affecting high ability students, consider the following information detailing common myths people (including educators) may have regarding the high ability student population. Keep these in mind as you continue to examine the provided material.

*Myth:* High ability students will achieve in school without guidance.

*Fact:* Without guidance and support, high ability students may lose motivation or underachieve.

*Myth:* High ability students should be given a large quantity of work at average grade level.

*Fact:* High ability students need a high degree of educational challenge, not more work at an average or repetitious level.

*Myth:* High ability students are “teacher pleasers” and easy to teach.

*Fact:* In order for high ability students to maintain high levels of achievement, teachers must make curricular adjustments. Without appropriate modifications, high ability students may develop behavior problems.

*Myth:* High ability students will make straight A’s.

*Fact:* High ability students will not always perform well in school, especially if unmotivated.

*Myth:* High ability students are nearly always from upper middle-class professional families.

*Fact:* High ability students are from diverse racial, ethnic, and socio-economic backgrounds.

*Myth:* High ability students are socially popular with their peers.

*Fact:* High ability students are often ostracized socially, especially at the secondary level.

*Myth:* High ability students learn best on their own.

*Fact:* High ability students benefit from being grouped with their intellectual peers for a significant part of their instructional day.

*Myth:* Extra attention given to high ability students fosters snobbery and is likely to lead to an elitist class.

*Fact:* Giftedness is fragile. Every child deserves an education that is appropriate to individual needs. Children at both extremes of the ability spectrum need special education.

*Myth:* High ability students are best served when tutoring.

*Fact:* When high ability students consistently tutor others, often they are not learning anything new. This can create unhealthy self-esteem issues for both the tutored and the high ability student.

[More on Myths of High Ability Education](#)

<http://www.nagc.org/commonmyths.aspx>

[http://www.marylandpublicschools.org/MSDE/programs/giftedtalented/top\\_ten\\_myths\\_video](http://www.marylandpublicschools.org/MSDE/programs/giftedtalented/top_ten_myths_video)

# Curriculum & Instruction

High ability children benefit from differentiated instruction (i.e., adaptations or modifications to the general curriculum), instructional environments, methods, materials, or a specialized curriculum tailored to best suit their educational needs. Parents can discuss high ability students' needs for specially designed instruction with high ability and regular education teachers, their school's administration, and support staff. This specially designed instruction should be based on assessment of each individual student's needs and should not be a one-size-fits-all program.

When educators design such a program of individual instruction, they should keep in mind three fundamental differences that distinguish high ability learners from other learners:

- ◆ The capacity to learn at faster rates, more in-depth and with greater complexity;
- ◆ The capacity to find, solve, and act on problems more readily;
- ◆ The capacity to manipulate abstract ideas and make connections.

## Curriculum, Instruction, Process, and Product

In developing specially designed instruction, educators should consider the following four concepts in their framework: Curriculum, Instruction, Process, and Product. They are the key principles that provide a guide for high ability program development.

## Curriculum

Teachers should:

- ◆ Include more elaborate, complex, and in-depth study of major ideas, key concepts, and themes that integrate knowledge within and across disciplines;
- ◆ Make it an extension of core learning, using both acceleration and enrichment strategies to streamline or compact curriculum that the student is able to master quickly;
- ◆ Encourage exposure to, selection of, and use of varied, challenging, and specialized resources;
- ◆ Provide opportunities for students to recognize complex relationships and arrive at sound generalizations;
- ◆ Stress higher-level thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills;
- ◆ Set high standards that demand rigorous expectations for student work and performance demonstration.

## Instruction

Instruction should:

- ◆ Promote in-depth learning and investigation that deals with real-life problems and issues;
- ◆ Include content and concepts that promote students' involvement as practitioners of the discipline;
- ◆ Allow for the development and application of productive thinking skills to enable students to re-conceptualize existing knowledge and/or generate new understanding;
- ◆ Be flexibly paced and matched to the student's ability, pre-assessment data, learning style, interest, and motivation.

## Process

The Process should:

- ◆ Provide students with the freedom to choose topics to study and the methods to use in manipulating and transforming information;
- ◆ Promote independent, self-directed, and in-depth study. Encourage the application of advanced research and methodological skills;
- ◆ Focus on open-ended tasks;
- ◆ Provide opportunities to develop leadership and group interaction skills;
- ◆ Allow student-centered discussion, Socratic questioning, and seminar-type learning.

## Product

Teachers should:

- ◆ Encourage the development of products that challenge existing ideas and produce new ones;
- ◆ Incorporate the application of discipline methodologies in product development;
- ◆ Promote products that are comparable to those made by professionals in the designated field;
- ◆ Require that products of high ability students represent application, analysis, and synthesis of knowledge;
- ◆ Provide the opportunity to create products/solutions that focus on real-world issues;
- ◆ Establish high-level and exemplary criteria to assess student performance and products.

# Differentiation

One definition of differentiation is:

Making lessons in the classroom different so that all children's needs are met; the teacher doesn't just "teach to the middle" but finds ways to incorporate all levels of ability.

It can be particularly challenging to differentiate or adapt instruction to respond to the varying student needs in the heterogeneous, mixed-ability classroom. In such a class it is not surprising to find students at both ends of the learning curve: those performing multiple years above grade level as well as those still struggling with concepts learned in prior academic years (while the majority of students in the class will have abilities falling somewhere in between). At the same time these students will all have different favorite areas of, as well as differing methods for, learning.

In such a setting it is impossible to develop any one-size-fits-all template or cookie-cutter curriculum; a teacher will be compelled to employ a variety of learning options designed to engage the students' varying interests, learning profiles, and ability levels. It is important to note, however, that the differentiated classroom is not one where the primary instruction is similar for all students and adjustments to accommodate learning levels merely consist of varying the degree of testing or reporting. Nor is it appropriate to give more advanced learners extra work or extension assignments when "normal" class work is completed. It is crucial that their instruction be substantively different in that it allows them to investigate material with greater depth and complexity as appropriate. Additionally, pre-assessment is an effective tool to identify students who have already mastered material and who could benefit from

accelerated curriculum compacting. When planning, a teacher should try to keep the following in mind:

1. Provide multiple opportunities for creative outlets through open-ended projects and products.
2. Provide depth in content areas and subjects of interest to high ability students, helping them move beyond the curriculum.
3. Allow high ability students to work together a portion of every day. This will stimulate them to achieve more than if they work alone or in mixed-ability groups.
4. Make sure high ability students are not punished with MORE work or a lesser grade because they take a risk. Replace the standard curriculum with more challenging opportunities and/or an accelerated rate of instruction.
5. Provide higher-level activities and lesson options on a regular basis, including divergent and evaluative thinking.
6. Allow time for high ability students to explore their passion areas and express them in varied disciplines and mediums.
7. Provide opportunities for high ability learners to be challenged and encourage perseverance in the face of obstacles.
8. Encourage independent study and research skills, including the use of multiple resources and the reading of original documents.
9. Reduce the amount of lecture, worksheets, drill, and practice.
10. Remember: BOTH enrichment and acceleration are necessary.

# Engaging Students' Thinking

Educational psychologist Benjamin Bloom developed a classification of intellectual behavior levels important in learning. He identified six levels, from the simple recall or recognition of facts, as the lowest level, through increasingly more complex and abstract mental levels, to the highest order of evaluation. This breakdown can be used to better understand high ability learners when we recognize that they process thoughts and information in the upper levels of the scale.

<i>6. Creating</i>
<i>5. Evaluating</i>
<i>4. Analyzing</i>
<i>3. Applying</i>
<i>2. Understanding</i>
<i>1. Remembering</i>

In an analysis, Bloom found that over 95% of test questions students encountered in school required them to think only at the lowest possible level... the recall of information. Yet engaging high ability thinkers in this way does a disservice to students who spend their time processing at the upper levels of the taxonomy. Rather than requiring students to regurgitate information, teachers should be encouraged to allow high ability students to utilize the upper three levels of thinking in a fashion similar to the following:

<b>Level:</b>	<b>Ask Students To:</b>	<b>Suggested End Results:</b>
Analyzing	Compare/contrast, solve, investigate, examine, classify, inspect	Report, conclusion, plan, survey, solution to a mystery or mock crime scene, questionnaire
Evaluating	Choose, rank, assess, grade, critique, judge	Book review, self-assessment, current events debate, court trial, editorial
Creating	Create, develop, design, compose, invent	Original story, game, musical composition, poem, invention, piece of artwork, hypothesis, experiment

# Acceleration

When investigating appropriate educational environments for your high ability child, it is always important to fall back on just what it means for a child to be a high ability learner. When a student is considered high ability, this doesn't make them more or less special than any other classmate. What this does mean, however, is that high ability learners grasp and master educational concepts at a faster rate, with fewer repetitions, than their non-high ability peers. For example, a typically bright child may take six to eight repetitions of material to achieve mastery. The high ability learner, on the other hand, only needs to be exposed to content once or twice to master the same material. (In fact, studies have shown that more than two repetitions can be detrimental to a high ability child's learning.) Enabled to learn at their own pace, high ability children have the potential to learn an additional semester's worth of content every school year compared to their non-high ability classmates.

Because of this speed of learning, high ability children greatly benefit from having some form of acceleration incorporated into their educational plans, and the various educational options outlined on the next page can serve to address this need. Whatever methodology is employed, however, it is crucial to stress that these tools should be utilized to allow high ability children to explore more and to learn more... they should not become just more work. For example, if high ability children are given a pull-out option of small group instruction in mathematics, they could be allowed to investigate concepts and ideas not covered in the core curriculum, or to investigate the class's subject matter in greater depth and complexity. They should not be given merely longer or more problems of the same material the rest of the class is already doing.

While subject-level acceleration fits the needs of high ability students specifically in the areas where they are advanced, parents may also want to consider grade-level accelerations (i.e., grade skipping) as well. Educators sometimes resist this intervention, citing concerns over the social well-being of children who are advanced one or more grades. But while acceleration may not be appropriate for all children, studies have overwhelmingly shown that grade-level accelerations are positive experiences for high ability children, especially when it comes to their social-emotional environments, as high ability kids frequently feel more at home among their older, intellectual peers. Alternatively, we need to realize we could be damaging high ability learners by retaining them in a particular grade just because of their chronological age. Accelerated children continue to perform at a comparably high level in their new grade, significantly outpacing high ability classmates who did not accelerate.

The most successful grade-level accelerations are ones where a team-based approach is used to develop a concrete plan for the accelerated child's success. Resources like the Iowa Acceleration Scale Manual are available to help schools and parents decide whether it is the right step to take for their child. With effective support in their new environments, high ability children can easily bridge any gaps in learning resulting from the grade skip and continue to absorb new material at their accelerated pace.

The new Guidelines for Developing an Academic Acceleration Policy is a joint publication from NAGC, the Belin Blank Center at the University of Iowa, and the Council of State Directors of Programs for the Gifted to help schools and districts develop a policy. It can be downloaded from the NAGC website at [www.nagc.org](http://www.nagc.org).

# Service Options

A variety of educational service options across the academic spectrum are appropriate for high ability children and may be employed individually or in concert with each other.

Whether geared towards elementary, middle, or high school students, a school district could employ many of the following options:

- ☑ Curriculum Compacting: Skipping over material that has already been mastered and working instead on areas that are new and challenging.
- ☑ Cluster Grouping: Grouping students of similar intellect or interest (either at the same grade level or different ones)
- ☑ Independent Study: Allowing a student to work in-depth on a specific area of interest to him or her. (This helps focus on the child's specific needs and learning styles.)
- ☑ Single Subject Acceleration: For children working at least one grade level above peers, this allows them to study at their appropriate learning level.
- ☑ Whole Grade Acceleration: A child who is ahead of peers in most areas (academic, physical, social, etc.) could be moved to the next grade.
- ☑ Pull-Out Classes: This allows the high ability child to go to a resource room where work will be more focused on higher level thinking, problem solving and general work with wide-ranging themes that appeal to the child.
- ☑ Mentorships: A student can work with or "shadow" an adult/college student who works in (or has expertise at) an area of specific interest to the child.

☑ Learning Contracts: Combines the flexibility of independent study with the structure and guidance of "regular" assignments. The child has choices in how and what her or she will learn, how this will be produced, and how the assignment will be graded.

☑ Telescoping Curriculum: Determining what content the student has already mastered so that he/she may move through a subject more rapidly. (An example of this would be completing two years of math in one school year.)

☑ Tiered Assignments: Adjusting instruction of the same lesson or concept to accommodate high, middle, and low readiness levels.

☑ Self-Contained Classroom: A classroom in which all students have been identified as high ability. This is their everyday classroom assignment.

☑ Field Experiences: Out-of-school educational experiences and programs such as trips, workshops, or extracurricular activities. Examples: Odyssey of the Mind, Future Problem Solving, Mock Trial.

☑ Honors Classes: Regular curriculum covered at a faster pace with greater depth, abstraction, or complexity.

☑ Advanced Placement: A type of acceleration in which students are taught college-level classes in high school and take an AP exam administered by the College Board.

☑ Dual Enrollment: Students can take college courses while still enrolled in high school, earning both high school and college credit.

# Alternative Schooling Options

Whether or not their school district has an established high ability program, sometimes parents wish to consider different educational paths for their children than the traditional public school system. As with any choice in a child's education, the best environment may vary depending upon what's best for the individual child, and what's best for one family may not be appealing to another.

## Public Charter Schools

Under the federal Public Charter Schools Program Indiana began authorizing these schools in 2002. They provide small-scale educational programs managed by governing boards comprised of teachers, parents, and community members, and offer a range of educational programs and enhanced parent-teacher communication.

Information:

- ~ <http://www.incharters.org/>
- ~ <http://www.doe.in.gov/charterschools/>

The Open Enrollment Program provides interdistrict and intradistrict enrollment options for students on a space-available basis in order to improve academic achievement and reduce racial, ethnic, and economic isolation. Parents have the choice to move their child to another school corporation as long as they are willing to abide by the cash transfer policies of the accepting school district.

Information:

- ~ <http://mb2.ecs.org/reports/Report.aspx?id=205>
- ~ [www.doe.in.gov/finance/docs/TransferTuitionFAQ.pdf](http://www.doe.in.gov/finance/docs/TransferTuitionFAQ.pdf)

## Private/Non-Public Schools

For non-public schools who want to be accredited, the Indiana State Board of Education has established a performance-based accreditation system. The standards for accreditation are the same standards required of all public schools.

Information:

- ~ <http://www.independentschools.com/indiana/>
- ~ <http://www.doe.in.gov/htmls/privsch.html>
- ~ <http://www.doe.in.gov/sservices/counseling/highschool/privateeducation.html>
- ~ <http://www.inpea.org/>

Home Schooling is an option parents may want to choose in order to educate their children at home themselves. They should file a form with their local school superintendent stating their intention to home school.

Information:

- ~ <http://www.doe.in.gov/sservices/homeschool/relationship.html>
- ~ <http://www.doe.in.gov/sservices/homeschool/>
- ~ <http://www.homeschoolinginindiana.com/>

## Online Learning Courses

A growing number of universities are offering distance online learning courses for gifted students. Most require testing documentation (either provided by the student/parent or by testing through their institute) for enrollment.

Information:

- ~ <http://www.ctd.northwestern.edu/gll/>
- ~ <http://www.gifted.uconn.edu/WebClasses/index.htm>
- ~ <http://cty.jhu.edu/>

## Online/Virtual Schools

Similar to online learning courses but encompass the entire school curriculum.

- ~ <http://www.k12.com/ha>
- ~ <http://indianaonlineacademy.org/>
- ~ <http://www.connectionsacademy.com/indiana-school/home.aspx>

Schools for the Gifted:

- ~ <http://www.sycamoreschool.org/>
- ~ <http://www.bsu.edu/academy/>

# High Ability Does Not Always Equal Good Student

A note before we leave this section: Just because a child is a high ability learner doesn't mean that he or she is going to be the school valedictorian or even the best pupil in a given class. High ability children are the way they are because it is intrinsic to the way they think and learn. However, as illustrated throughout this booklet, there are a variety of obstacles that may keep them from reaching their true potential. It is especially important that their special academic needs be addressed in the classroom so that they are able to achieve to the best of their ability.

If we examine some of the myths about high ability learners on the previous page, we see a number of misconceptions that often lead to poor performance in the classroom, many surrounding how high ability kids are taught. Like all children, high ability students deserve to be motivated and educated in a manner consistent with their needs. More often than not it is inappropriate instructional methods that lead to under-performance. For example, high ability kids who are routinely subjected to whole-group instruction (i.e., where the entire class is taught the same material, at the same pace, at the same time) may quickly become frustrated with going over the same material they mastered after just one or two repetitions. These kids may quickly lose motivation and tune out or, worse, exhibit behavioral problems that disrupt the class. Similarly, high ability kids aren't always willing to learn in the manner or at the pace that teachers prefer to teach. And remember, just because students are labeled "high ability" doesn't mean that they

are equally so in every discipline. A high ability child may be an advanced learner in mathematics but may be on par with the rest of the class (or even learning disabled) in another area, such as writing.

If we think back to some of the proposed definitions of giftedness earlier in the text, we recall that one way of defining a high ability student is someone who shows, or has the potential of showing, high levels of achievement in a number of areas. Therein lies the challenge classroom teachers face. Not only must they teach to the whole class, but for high ability learners they must also identify the particular areas and styles of learning that allow the students to work toward that high level of achievement. This may mean they have to alter their teaching methodology on a student-by-student basis, differentiating instruction to meet the needs of all their students at all ability levels. But for high ability learners, this differentiation is often the key to whether they succeed in class or whether they come to be seen as an underperforming and problem student.

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# Advocacy

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# Where To Begin

In this section we'll explore ways to advocate for your child's needs. Please keep in mind that advocacy is a process, not an event. Don't expect changes overnight. Changes can come, but they will take time. By learning about a variety of ways to advocate for your child, and how to put this knowledge into action, you can increase the likelihood that teachers and administrators will be able to join with you in this process. First, we'll start with some basic information and tips to help you get started.

- ◆ According to PL 221, Indiana schools are required to meet the needs of all learners, including those with high ability. Your child is entitled to a Free and Appropriate Public Education.
- ◆ Read about what your school district reports to the Indiana Department of Education. Go to <http://www.doe.in.gov/exceptional/gt/gtgrants.html>
- ◆ Work cooperatively with your school, but let your elected school board members know of your need and support for High Ability services.
- ◆ Contact your elected members of the Indiana General Assembly and let them know of the needs of high ability students and need for state support through regulation and funding. Ask that Indiana require all schools to provide an appropriate education for high ability students.
- ◆ Join other parents of high ability students in your district or region. Organize informative events for parents and enrichment activities for children. Become an Affiliate Group of the Indiana Association for the Gifted.
- ◆ Get educated about High Ability education by reading and researching on your own. The resources at the end of this document can help get you started.
- ◆ Be prepared to meet with your child's teachers and administrators. These meetings should include ideas and suggestions from you; being able to provide support and solutions is greatly advantageous.

## Legislative Advocacy

Real changes in education for High Ability students can also come through government legislation. Getting involved in advocating at the local and state levels is another way to support your child's needs. Below are some websites that will link you to information about how to get involved in this way.

### **The Indiana General Assembly**

[www.in.gov/legislative](http://www.in.gov/legislative)

Stay up to date on current Indiana legislation.

### **Finding Your Representative**

[www.vote-smart.org](http://www.vote-smart.org)

By typing in your zip code, you are able to identify your state senator and representative for the General Assembly.

### **Indiana Association for the Gifted Advocacy Page**

[http://www.iag-online.org/Indiana\\_Association\\_for\\_the\\_Gifted/Advocacy.html](http://www.iag-online.org/Indiana_Association_for_the_Gifted/Advocacy.html)

# Prepare Yourself

## Assess Your Child and His/Her Needs

1. **Find out as much as you can about your child.** State law does not require that children be tested for high ability. If your child has not been tested at school, and you suspect that s/he may be high ability, request testing be done through school services or pursue individual, independent testing to determine if your child is indeed high ability. Testing for potential giftedness can be arranged by the school through Ball State University or at your own expense through independent psychologists in your area. Usually, you will receive educational recommendations along with the test results. You can use these to discuss your child's needs with the school.
2. **Assess how well the school is meeting the needs of your child.** Listen to your child. Is he happy with school? Does he enjoy his school work? Does he find anything a challenge? Is what he reads at home of similar difficulty to what he reads at school? How does s/her feel about the social connections being made?
3. **Begin to learn all you can about high ability education in general.** Read everything you can get your hands on in order to educate yourself. Do "Google" searches, check out the resources at the end of this document, talk to other parents, etc. The more you learn about high ability education and raising a gifted child, the more prepared you will be to work with your child's school.

## Become Informed About Schools and Requirements

1. **Know state requirements.** The state of Indiana does not require that schools provide separate services for high ability students, but it does make grant money available to school corporations for use in providing high ability programming. District reports are online.
2. **Gather information about your school.** Call the school corporation office and ask who the High Ability Coordinator or contact person is. Introduce yourself; tell this person that you suspect your child might have high abilities and you are interested in learning more about what your school system has to offer. Ask for a copy of the district's high ability plan.
3. **Review the information and chart out for yourself what is offered and when.**
4. **Compare the information you have gathered with what you know is required.** Ask questions to fill in your understanding of the local program.

## Become an active participant in your child's school and district.

1. Help out in your child's classroom.
2. Visit with the principal.
3. Express interest in be a part of the School Improvement Team and/or the district Broad Based Planning Committee.
4. Attend local school board meetings.
5. Attend G/T Parental Support Group meetings.
6. Volunteer to begin a G/T Parent Group if there isn't one already. IAG can help.

# Meeting With Teachers & Administrators

A positive working relationship is important, and change is most likely to occur when the advocate approaches his/her task with these things in mind: Use good sense, good humor and good manners.

## For Meetings

- ~ Be professional in your approach and respectful of others' points of view; be articulate and tactful.
- ~ Be aware of the decision-making process and chain of command in the organization, and act accordingly. Approaching your child's teacher first is probably the best idea, but check to see if your school sets up any type of Team Meetings that would include the principal, high ability coordinator, and/or other teachers your child has.
- ~ Prepare well for your meetings; be well-organized and accurate in your reporting. Do not exaggerate and do not be emotional, but provide specific examples to illustrate your points.
- ~ Be calmly persistent and do not be afraid to ask questions.
- ~ Be prepared with practical suggestions and reasonable goals for progress. Most teachers and administrators will welcome input from parents which saves them both time and energy. Implementing the ideas may not always happen easily but you will at least have set some common goals.
- ~ Ask that student growth be measured. Having goals and suggestions in place is wonderful, and seeing these come to fruition is even better. However, make sure that you and the school are gauging your child's progress. The overall goal is for your child to be learning new things every day!

## Working With Your Child's Teacher

Teachers today have one of the most difficult jobs when it comes to educating children. Most are expected to teach a classroom full of students with a vast range of needs and abilities. Anything you can do to aid your child's teacher in planning and providing for your own child's academic experience will make his or her job easier. As you spend time educating yourself about the world of high ability education be on the lookout for ideas that you can pass along to the teachers. A few examples might include:

- ~ Provide a different spelling list with more challenging words.
- ~ Extend his or her science and social studies lessons by suggesting a project or report, and sending in library books based on the topics being studied.
- ~ If there is a computer in the room, provide websites (researched by you) that relate to topics being studied in class.
- ~ Provide ideas for open-ended projects that could include all students.
- ~ Help plan inexpensive field trips or arrange for guest speakers.

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# Resources

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*IAG would like to acknowledge and thank the Connecticut Association for the Gifted (CAG) for allowing the reprint of portions of the material contained within this booklet.*

## Online Resources

There are numerous resources to assist in meeting the needs of high ability students. While the following list is by no means comprehensive, it provides a good sampling of a number of websites and other resources available. (Resources are listed as a service to parents and teachers; however, inclusion on the list below does not necessarily constitute an endorsement by IAG.)

Indiana Association for the Gifted

<http://www.iag-online.org/>

[Indiana\\_Association\\_for\\_the\\_Gifted/IAG\\_Home.html](http://www.iag-online.org/Indiana_Association_for_the_Gifted/IAG_Home.html)

IN State Department of Education High Ability Home Page

<http://www.doe.in.gov/exceptional/gt/welcome.html>

National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC)

[www.nagc.org](http://www.nagc.org)

Supporting Emotional Needs of the Gifted (SENG)

[www.sengifted.org](http://www.sengifted.org)

World Council for Gifted and Talented Children

[www.worldgifted.org](http://www.worldgifted.org)

The Association for the Gifted (TAG)

[www.cectag.org](http://www.cectag.org)

The Association for the Education of Gifted Underachieving Students [www.aegus.org](http://www.aegus.org)

Hoagies' Gifted Education Page

[www.hoagiesgifted.org](http://www.hoagiesgifted.org)

Center For Gifted Studies and Talent Development, Ball State University

<http://cms.bsu.edu/Academics/CentersandInstitutes/GiftedStudies.aspx>

National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented

[www.gifted.uconn.edu/NRCGT/html](http://www.gifted.uconn.edu/NRCGT/html)

Neag Center for Gifted Education and Talent Development, University of Connecticut

[www.gifted.uconn.edu](http://www.gifted.uconn.edu)

Johns Hopkins Center for Talented Youth (CTY)

[www.cty.jhu.edu](http://www.cty.jhu.edu)

Duke University Talent Identification Program (TIP)

[www.tip.duke.edu](http://www.tip.duke.edu)

Stanford University's Education Program for Gifted Youth (EPGY) [www.epgy.stanford.edu](http://www.epgy.stanford.edu)

Northwestern's Center for Talent Development (CTD) [www.ctd.northwestern.edu](http://www.ctd.northwestern.edu)

Center for Gifted Education at the College of William & Mary [www.cfge.wm.edu](http://www.cfge.wm.edu)

Purdue University's Gifted Education Resource Institute (GERI) [www.geri.soe.purdue.edu](http://www.geri.soe.purdue.edu)

University of Iowa Center for Gifted Education and Talent Development

[www.education.uiowa.edu/belinblank](http://www.education.uiowa.edu/belinblank)

The Davidson Institute for Talent Development

[www.davidsongifted.org](http://www.davidsongifted.org)

Gifted Education Press

[www.giftedpress.com](http://www.giftedpress.com)

Prufrock Press

[www.prufrock.com](http://www.prufrock.com)

Critical Thinking Press

[www.criticalthinking.com](http://www.criticalthinking.com)

Great Potential Press

[www.giftedbooks.com](http://www.giftedbooks.com)

Free Spirit Publishing

[www.freespirit.com](http://www.freespirit.com)

Pieces of Learning

[www.piecesoflearning.com](http://www.piecesoflearning.com)

# Other Resources

## Parenting

### **A Parent's Guide to Gifted Children**

Webb, J., Gore, J., Amend, E., and DeVries, A. (2007)  
Scottsdale, AZ: Great Potential Press

### **Growing up Gifted (6th ed.)**

Clark, B. (2002)  
Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill Prentice Hall

### **Parenting Gifted Children**

Delisle, J. R. (2006)  
Waco, Texas: Prufrock Press Inc.

### **Helping Gifted Children Soar**

Strip, C., and Hirsch, G. (2000)  
Scottsdale, AZ: Great Potential Press

## On High Ability Education

### **Genius Denied**

Davidson, B. and Davidson, J. (2004)  
New York, NY: Simon and Schuster

### **A Nation Deceived: How Schools Hold Back America's Brightest Students Vol. 1 & 2**

Colangelo, N., Assouline, S. G., and Gross, U. M. (2004)  
Iowa City, IA: The University of Iowa

### **Light Up Your Child's Mind**

Renzulli, J. and Reis, S. (2009)  
New York, NY: Little, Brown and Company

## Underachievement

### **Becoming an Achiever**

Coil, C. (1994)  
Dayton, OH: Pieces of Learning

### **Encouraging Achievement**

Coil, C. (1999)  
Dayton, OH: Pieces of Learning

### **Why Bright Kids Get Poor Grades: And What You Can Do About It**

Rimm, S. (1995)  
New York, New York: Three Rivers Press

## Strategies for Differentiation & Acceleration

### **Differentiating Instruction in the Regular Classroom: How to Reach and Teach All Learners, Grades 3-12**

Heacox, D. (2002)  
Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publishing

### **Re-forming Gifted Education**

Rogers, K. (2002)  
Columbus, OH: Great Potential Press

### **How to Differentiate Instruction in Mixed Ability Classroom (2nd ed.)**

Tomlinson, C. A. (2001)  
Alexandria, VA: ASCD

### **Teaching Gifted Kids in the Regular Classroom**

Winebrenner, S. (2001)  
Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publishing

### **Acceleration For Gifted Learners K-5**

Smutney, J. F., Walker, S. Y., and Meckstroth, E. A. (2007)  
Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press

*This list is by no means comprehensive and specific resources provided are not necessarily endorsed by IAG.*