

Stop Wasting Gifted Minds

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America's ability to be served by its brightest and best is at risk.

Future scientists, doctors, and leaders eagerly desire—

and deserve—appropriately challenging work in

the early grades, but often have to wait until high school or college to receive it. As a result, countless children are forced to spend their elementary school years performing far below their capability.

Backed by federal initiatives such as the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, the nation has closed its eyes to its most talented students. NCLB's incentives and penalties focus primarily on underachieving students. But even as they scramble to meet NCLB requirements, schools cannot overlook their gifted learners.

Identifying the Gifted

The research is replete with studies showing that children as young as three can have identifiable, high levels of strength and talent. Although no single test can identify all of a child's abilities, most school districts have tools they can use to begin the identification process. These testing instruments (*see box*) measure intelligence and determine further testing needs.

One recently published assessment, the Kaufman Assessment Battery for Children II (KABC-II), deserves mention. Valid for children ages three through 18, it has a high ceiling for scores recorded by gifted children. Because the test does not rely on acquired knowledge, it also is able to reduce score differences between language and cultural groups.

Teacher observation and parent input are also highly valid in identifying gifted children. Although there are several formal tools teachers can use to assess giftedness (*see box*), their informal assessment of students' work, creativity, and talent can provide significant insight. Parents

can often provide helpful information about a child's developmental history. A combination of parent and teacher information can often identify which differentiation options would be most effective.

Developing an Elementary Gifted Program

Gifted children need two things: the chance to be with intellectual peers and coursework appropriate to their abilities. Either magnet or mainstream programs that group students by ability can satisfy the first need. The second need can be met by recognizing the significant learning differences that exist between gifted and non-gifted students.

Gifted children often require less instructional time, less repetition, and less practice to acquire a concept. Teachers can accommodate these children by compacting the curriculum, adjusting the pacing, varying the level of resources, increasing the complexity of assignments, or providing opportunities to explore subjects more deeply. All of these strategies should emphasize higher-order reasoning. In discussions, writing assignments, and oral

presentations, gifted students should have the opportunity to explain their thinking processes.

All children deserve the opportunity to make the learning gains they are capable of making. If gifted children are provided appropriate support at an early age they are less likely to fall into a pattern of under-performance later.

Since the gifted may include America's future leaders, they cannot be overlooked, put in a holding pattern, or held to marginal standards of achievement.

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Identifying and Assessing Giftedness

Testing instruments that can identify giftedness at an early age:

- Kaufman Assessment Battery for Children II
- Stanford-Binet IV
- Stanford-Binet LM
- Wechsler Pre-Primary Scale of Intelligence III
- Wechsler Individual Achievement Test II
- Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children IV
- Woodcock-Johnson Achievement Battery IV

Individualized tests that can determine the abilities of children who test in the top percentiles of other assessments:

- Midwest Academic Talent Search EXPLORE Tests
- Woodcock-Johnson III

Standardized tests that can help identify gifted children:

- Iowa Test of Basic Skills
- TerraNova Basic Battery

Other useful tools for teachers:

- Scales for Rating Behavioral Characteristics of Superior Students—Revised
- Karen Rogers' Teacher Inventory for Learning Strengths
- Kingore Observation Inventory Grades K-3 (also available for grades 4-8)