

UPPER SADDLE RIVER

## Gifted kids may underachieve if not challenged

DEAR EDITOR:

I was very pleased to read last week's article about the gifted program in the Upper Saddle River School District ("Are gifted kids properly identified/taught?" May 1, Page 4). However, I believe a few words are needed explaining what it means to be a gifted child and why a program is needed in our schools.

Many people think of a gifted child as the one who 'knows it

all,' aced all the exams and is well on his way to Harvard. However, success is not so easily achieved for many gifted children.

Gifted children are known to learn faster than their peers. Therefore, the pace of the regular curriculum is often tediously slow for gifted students. Boredom and frustration may result in behavior problems in the classroom. This affects not only the gifted child, but the other children in the class as well.

In addition, gifted students see relationships and solutions that other children do not, and often seem to be 'off task.' Unless a teacher is trained in gifted education, he or she may be dismissive of such a student because of a failure to comprehend the student's response. In fact, without training, the 'twice exceptional' student who is gifted but also has special needs may be overlooked entirely.

Without curriculum compacting and acceleration, the curriculum often fails to rise to a level that is challenging to a gifted child. Apathy may set in and they may tune out, make careless errors on work that they find too easy to merit their full attention, rush to get assignments 'over with' and generally underachieve. Subsequently, when they are confronted with challenging work, they often give up as they are accustomed to getting the answer quickly and don't want or know how to fully apply themselves.

Thus, while the other children in the class are gaining valuable

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academic skills such as perseverance and good study habits, gifted students are often coasting. The result: Gifted students eventually 'hit the wall' at some point in their education. Then they face a real crisis: Either learn academic skills and adapt quickly, or face failure despite their innate abilities.

The lesson: There is a practical aspect to academic success and gifted students cannot obtain the necessary skills unless the curriculum is properly paced and sufficiently rigorous. By providing gifted children with such a curriculum, we would give them skills to succeed in school and in life.

Cynthia Vasilakos  
Upper Saddle River

UPPER SADDLE RIVER

## School district has 'rose colored' view on gifted program

DEAR EDITOR:

The organization, PAGE (Par-

ents Advocating for Gifted Education), is not a "small group" of unhappy parents, as referred to by Reynolds Elementary School Principal Joanne Vernon ("Are gifted kids properly identified/taught?" May 1, Page 4).

Rather, it's a large number of families frustrated by shortcomings in the curriculum of the Upper Saddle River School District. The school system does not have proper procedures to identify gifted children, nor does it offer these children appropriate educational opportunities. For the most part, it ignores both their existence and their unique needs.

For educators to claim that the majority of the parents in the district are satisfied with the current programming is an eye-opening view into their rose-colored perspective. Despite the district's success in educating many children, the petition recently signed by more than 130 families in Upper Saddle River and submitted to the school board states plainly: "We do not believe the current practices and programs of the district meet the needs of these academically gifted children." Yet the board still refuses to acknowledge its one-size fits all approach might not meet the needs of this particular group.

PAGE's objective is clear. The

schools should offer gifted children appropriate educational programs. Since June 2005, the state has mandated school districts to provide - starting in kindergarten - proper identification measures and educational adaptations for gifted children. The New Jersey Department of Education calls for addressing the needs of gifted students through pull-out programs, grouping, curriculum compacting and acceleration in addition to a differentiated curriculum.

PAGE has attempted to work with the district on these issues, and we will continue to do so even as the board seems more interested in public relations than addressing the underlying deficiencies in our curriculum for educating gifted children. We invite members of the community to view our correspondence and the district's responses at our Web site, USRPAGE.org.

It took years for the board to put into place a written policy that complies with current law. How many more years must we wait for proper identification measures and appropriate programming for gifted children to fulfill that policy?

Miriam Bakal  
PAGE spokesperson