

Parent Guide



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Indiana Association for the Gifted

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Welcome Letter

Many of you may be experiencing a myriad of emotions related to your children and their experiences both in and out of school. While you may be amazed at the advanced skills and higher level thinking your children demonstrate, you may simultaneously be anxious about how these skills will and should be nurtured both in and out of school. You may be frustrated that your children are capable of reading several levels above grade level, yet they cannot manage to organize their book bags or find their homework assignments. You may be worrying about your children socially (do they have enough friends?) or emotionally (why are they so intense about everything?). Finally, you may see the love of learning on your young children's faces and wonder what you need to do as an advocate to ensure that they will be receiving the appropriate differentiated school experiences that will continue to foster such an enthusiasm for learning. The parent section of the IAG website has been designed to provide information and resources for parents on dimensions of giftedness and programs for gifted students. General information on giftedness is available in various print and online resources mentioned here; however, some of the information on identification and services in schools provided here is specific to parents of gifted children living in Indiana. IAG has prepared this information through the lens of understanding how gifted education (termed as high ability education in Indiana) manifests according to our specific state mandate for identification and services. We hope you find the information useful, and we encourage you to pass it along to other parents as well.

The Indiana Association for the Gifted
Reviewed and updated in August 2022

What is “Gifted” or “High Ability”

"Giftedness" or "high ability" characteristics present themselves differently in every child, just as every individual is unique and exhibits his or her own personality. 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. 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 skills may be masked by socio-economic factors or
- gifted underachievers who have fallen into behavioral patterns because they have not been sufficiently stimulated and challenged.

While it is difficult to identify precisely 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 ability 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 with other students of the same age, experience, or environment; and*
2. *is characterized by exceptional gifts, talents, motivation, or interests.*

"Domain" includes the following areas of aptitude and talent:

1. *General intellectual*
2. *General creative*
3. *Specific academic*
4. *Technical and practical arts*
5. *Visual and performing arts*

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 without being dependent on a single measure or index. It is generally recognized that approximately three million children in the United States, or a total of approximately 10% of the population when you consider all who might be identified in one or more domains.

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 class 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 can continue learning at an accelerated pace.

On the other hand, there may be 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). In such cases, specific strategies might be needed 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 every child so that they may strive to reach that potential.

High Ability vs. Gifted Terminology

You will notice both the terms “gifted” and “high ability” often used interchangeably. 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. To clarify, “high ability” and “gifted” are intended to have the same meaning throughout all IAG documentation. There are simply ways in which the word “gifted” fits better into the content of the information given. High Ability, like the word “gifted,” applies to those whose academic abilities and potential are greater than those of their peers.

Characteristics of High Ability Learners

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

Characteristics	Positive Behavior	Negative Behavior
Learns rapidly/easily	Memorizes and masters basic facts quickly	Gets bored easily, resists drill, disturbs others, underachievers
Reads intensively	Reads, uses library on own	Neglects other responsibilities
Perfectionist	Exceptional accomplishments	Intolerant of mistakes, reluctant to try new things
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
Can work independently at times	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/judgements 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

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Self-motivated, self-sufficient	Requires minimum teachers direction or help	Aggressive, challenges authority

Note: While some characteristics may have negative behavioral manifestations, the negative behaviors are not excused. It helps us to understand the origin in high ability, but educational professionals and parents must assist the individual with developing self regulatory behaviors to maintain productive use of time and foster appropriate behaviors toward others.

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 similar 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 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. Also, 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 some 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 frequently 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 remember 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 sophisticated, 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. Increasingly there is recognition of high ability children who also have conditions that interfere with their ability to learn (e.g., learning disabilities, ADHD, processing difficulties, etc.). It is essential 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 underperforming if they don't recognize the duality of the 2e child's extremes. For this reason, it is essential 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 adequately 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 but are not limited to 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 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.

Definition of Social and Emotional Needs

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. Alternatively, 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 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 more strongly than their non-high ability peers. Moreover, 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 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. To help them thrive, we must ensure that they can mature in a secure and supportive environment that nurtures their innate inquisitive nature.

High Ability Does Not Always Equal a Good Student

A note before we begin 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 refers to the way these children think and learn and not necessarily their behaviors and attitudes toward school. 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 can achieve to the best of their ability.

If we examine some of the myths about high ability learners in the previous section, we see many 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 underperformance. 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 by having to go over the same information 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 it is important to 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.

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.

Identification in Indiana

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

Indiana schools are required to 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)

Indiana Code

For specifics on Indiana Code, please refer to the Indiana Association for the Gifted's [Advocacy Handbook](#).

Selecting a High Ability Program

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 #1: High ability students will achieve in school without guidance.

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

Myth #2: High ability students should be given a large quantity of work at the average grade level.

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

Myth #3: High ability students are “teacher pleasers” and easy to teach.

Fact: 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 #4: High ability students will make straight A's.

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

Myth #5: 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 #6: High ability students are socially popular with their peers.

Fact: High ability students can be ostracized socially, especially at the secondary level.

Myth #7: 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 #8: 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 #9: 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.

Key Considerations for a District High Ability Program

What should you look for to know if your child's school district 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.
- At one or more times in elementary school, are all students at a grade assessed to determine their ability level?
- Do identification and programming for high ability begin early? Ideally, these should be in place for Kindergarteners.
- Do they use multifaceted assessment? In other words, does the school rely on several sources of testing data when considering students? Can students be identified for high ability and/or for high achievement? It need not be both.
- 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" regarding meeting the requirements for high ability programming?

If your school district has a high ability program in place, this is 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 as having high ability in a particular domain, how are their different academic needs 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 of a mixed ability classroom for services?
- Are the teachers who work with high ability students specially trained to work with this population? (Do they have licensure in high ability education or at least some professional development training?)
- What type of curriculum is being used with high ability students? Are they expected to consider topics at a greater depth or complexity and use more critical thinking, or merely do more work?
- Is pre-assessment a standard 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?

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 an assessment of each 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 fundamental 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 can 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:

- Have strategies for the development of critical and creative thinking embedded in the instruction;
- 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 "regular" 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 the 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 standards-based 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 pace 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 understand high ability learners better when we recognize that they process thoughts and information in the upper levels of the scale.

Bloom's Taxonomy
6. Creating
5. Evaluating
4. Analyzing
3. Applying
2. Understanding
1. Recalling

In an analysis, Bloom found that over 95% of the test questions students encountered in school required them to think only at the lowest possible level... the recall of information. 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 top three levels of thinking in a fashion similar to the following:

LEVEL	ASK STUDENTS TO:	SUGGESTED END RESULT:
4. Analyzing	Compare/contrast, solve, investigate, examine, classify, inspect	Report, conclusion, plan, survey, solution to a mystery or mock crime scene, questionnaire
5. Evaluating	Choose, rank, assess, grade, critique, judge	Book review, self-assessment, current events debate, court trial, editorial
6. 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 required 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 most 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 high ability 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 active support in their new environments, many 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.

Service Options

A comprehensive review of the research (Rogers, 2007) indicates that services leading to the greatest achievement gains for high ability students include the following:

- Acceleration: Opportunities for various forms of content, subject and grade acceleration as needed
- Differentiation: Differentiation in pace, amount of review and practice, focus on larger concepts, and interdisciplinary connections
- Daily Challenge: Opportunity for daily challenge in identified areas of high ability
- Ability Grouping: Opportunities for high ability learners to socialize and to learn with like-ability peers
- Independent Work: Opportunities to work independently in areas of passion and talent.

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 can use one or a combination of the following options:

Service Options for Groups of Students

✓ Self-Contained Classroom: A classroom in which all students have been identified as high ability. This is their everyday classroom assignment. Small schools or districts may not be able to hold separate classes at each grade level in each school due to the small number of students needing this service. However, some districts are able to offer magnet programs where high ability students from throughout the district might come together to one school to form classes for differentiated high ability instruction.

✓ Between Class Grouping: The practice of “trading students” among teachers at a particular grade level, so that each teacher has a narrower range of abilities for the chosen subject or topic. The groups will require further differentiation in order to meet the needs

of the students within them, but this will be easier for the teacher to provide. This option is frequently combined with a cluster grouping model to provide flexibility for students needing high ability learning experiences in one or more subject areas. This requires the school to schedule the particular subjects involved to be held at the same time to facilitate student instruction.

✓ Cluster Grouping: The practice of identifying a small group of high ability students at a grade level and placing them in the same classroom at that grade level with the teacher best-suited and qualified to work with high ability learners. This teacher is not given any students of low ability to keep her from having an extreme range of abilities in her classroom. Additionally, she is not given the non-identified above average students. All teachers will then have some stronger students in their classes.

✓ Pull-Out Classes: This allows the high ability child to go out of their typical classroom 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.

✓ Honors Classes: Regular curriculum covered at a faster pace with greater depth, abstraction, or complexity. These will typically hold both high ability and above average students and are more commonly found in grades 7 – 10.

✓ Advanced Placement: A type of acceleration in which students are taught college -level classes in high school and take AP exams administered by the College Board. This is a recognized program nationally and internationally, allowing colleges to compare student academic preparation across state lines and beyond local curriculum. Each college decides what placement and credits will be allowed for these. This is recommended for students with high ability who are seeking more rigorous college preparation, competitive college admissions, and merit scholarship opportunities.

✓ Dual Enrollment: Students can take college courses while still enrolled in high school, earning both high school and college credit. The courses do not have common exams or a standardized curriculum and individual colleges decide what credits will be allowed to meet varying requirements. The college may award elective credits, but not necessarily credits toward a specific degree path. Some highly competitive colleges may not grant credits to out of state applicants.

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

Additional Service Options for Individual Students

✓ Curriculum Compacting: Skipping over material that has already been mastered and working instead on areas that are new and challenging.

✓ Independent Study: Allowing a student to work in-depth on a specific area of interest to him or her. This can help guide the focus on the child's particular needs and learning styles. It is also an engaging way to teach project organization, research, and presentation skills.

✓ 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 many areas (academic, physical, social, etc.) could be moved to the next grade. Decisions should be made on a case by case basis.

✓ 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 he 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.)

✓ 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, Robotics.

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. There is tremendous variation in focus, resources, and philosophy, so it is important for each family to thoroughly investigate the options and determine what is right for their child.

Links:

<http://www.incharters.org/>

<https://www.in.gov/doe/> search for Charter Schools and other topics

<https://www.in.gov/doe/it/accountability-dashboard/> Look for data for all schools in Indiana

<https://inview.doe.in.gov> Compare districts on particular metrics

Open Enrollment Program

The Open Enrollment Program provides interdistrict and intradistrict enrollment options for students on a space available basis 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 policies of the accepting school district. This may include providing transportation and it is if the other district is accepting transfer students.

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.

Link: <http://www.inpea.org/>

Home Schooling

Homeschooling is an option for parents who choose to educate their children themselves at home. Parents should file a form with their local school superintendent stating their intention to homeschool.

Links:

<http://www.homeschoolinginindiana.com/>

<https://www.in.gov/doe/students/homeschool-information/>

Online Learning Courses

A growing number of universities are offering distance online learning courses for students. Most require testing documentation (either provided by the student/the parent or by testing through their institute) for enrollment. These require students pay tuition. Interested parties should mount a broader search as the offerings change frequently.

Links:

<http://www.ctd.northwestern.edu/gll/>

<http://cty.jhu.edu/>

<https://www.davidsongifted.org/the-davidson-academy/>

Online/Virtual Schools

Similar to online learning courses but encompasses the entire school curriculum. Search beyond the links provided as more opportunities are in the process of being developed.

Links:

<http://www.k12.com/ha>

<http://indianaonlineacademy.org/>

<https://www.connectionsacademy.com/>

Schools for the Gifted:

These schools have a mission statement to specifically serve high ability students.

Links:

<http://www.sycamoreschool.org/> This is an independent school for Preschool – Grade 8

<http://www.bsu.edu/academy/> This is a public school for students in grades 11 and 12

Advocacy

For a complete guide to advocacy [click here](#).

Where to Begin in Advocating for Your Child

It is important to keep in mind that advocacy is a process, not an event. Don't expect changes overnight as a result of one meeting. Changes 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 of providing an appropriately differentiated education for your child.

Basic Rules for Advocacy and Characteristics of Successful Advocates

When asking for information and making suggestions for change, always **respect and follow the "Chain of Command."**

- If dealing with your child's specific needs, start with his teacher. Eventually meeting your child's needs may involve the school counselor (if available). It also may be appropriate to work with the building principal. However, start with a meeting with your child's teacher.
- If dealing with systemic High Ability program availability and issues, start with HA coordinator.
- High Ability Broad Based Planning Committee (BBPC) is a district wide committee familiar with services at all levels
- Superintendent
- School Board
- Indiana Department of Education (IDOE)
- Indiana General Assembly
- Hire a consultant if you need assistance

Become knowledgeable about what is required of schools in Indiana and how High Ability education is funded. The IAG Advocacy Handbook is a guide to Indiana Code and Rules relative to high ability students. It also provides advocacy guidance for policy change and/or increased funding and is available on the IAG website by [clicking here](#). Additionally, knowing where IAG stands on certain positions can help you in your advocacy efforts. Consult the IAG website for more up to date information <http://www.iag-online.org>

If you plan to meet with your state legislator, check out our [instructional video](#) with tips on how to conduct your meeting.

More information about advocating for an individual child is found in the following article downloaded from the National Association for Gifted Children website, [National Association for Gifted Children](#)

What Makes an Effective Advocate?

Effective advocates are:

- **Well informed** regarding their subject and armed with information supporting their goals. While decision-makers expect professionals to have special knowledge about gifted education, this expectation is not necessarily true for parents. Anecdotal information from parents is very effective in promoting services.
- **Knowledgeable about their constituency.** While advocates are usually speaking for themselves, they are sometimes authorized to speak as representatives of an organization. An effective advocate must be aware of the difference.
- **Resourceful** in finding information and gaining access to decision-makers.
- **Quietly persistent;** do not be afraid to ask questions.
- **Clear** about what action you want.
- **Imaginative** in suggesting solutions.
- **Respectful** of others' points of view
- **Politically aware**
- **Tactful**
- **Enthusiastic and pleasant**
- **Well organized and accurate,** not exaggerating, in your reporting and note taking.
- **Articulate;** prepare your main points and speak succinctly.
- **Knowledgeable** about the power hierarchy and other issues that may be central.
- **Sensitive** to others' reactions.

Effective advocates must do their homework ahead of time if they wish to influence policy decisions and legislation. Such homework includes being sure that requests are specific and proposals are well documented. In addition, it is important that advocates know the assignments, areas of expertise, and areas of interest of school officials and other decision-makers.

Decision-makers are obligated to be aware of all sides of an issue, and they must look at the total educational picture when making decisions. Therefore, effective advocates are prepared to respond to possible criticism and explain why high ability services should be a high priority within the provision of public education.

Advocacy will be more successful when the advocate has knowledge, good sense, good humor, and good manners.

Meeting With Teachers and Administrators

A positive working relationship is essential, and change is most likely to occur when the advocate approaches her task with an attitude of collaboration to find changes that could be considered.

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; check to see if your school sets up 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; provide specific examples pertaining to your child 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 is 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 challenging 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 partner with the teacher to try. Some might be able to be done both at home and at school. A few examples might include:

- Providing a different spelling list with more challenging words.
- Extending science and social studies lessons by suggesting a project or report related to the topics being studied.

- Suggesting appropriate websites (researched by you) that relate to topics studied in class.
- Providing ideas for open-ended projects that could include all students.
- Helping plan inexpensive field trips or arranging for guest speakers.
- Offering to help in the classroom so that grouping students for instruction can take place.
- Differentiating assessments by assigning projects or products to demonstrate knowledge instead of paper pencil tests.

Advocating for Gifted Education: What to Say

During the course of your correspondence or conversation, you are likely to be asked many questions. These inquiries frequently center around the age-old question, “Why should gifted children receive special services?” Here are few sample questions backed by well-informed answers provided by Professor of Gifted Studies at the University of St. Thomas, in St. Paul, MN, Dr. Karen Rogers. Reprinted with permission.

Rogers, K. (2002). *Re-forming gifted education: How parents and teachers can match the program to the child*. Scottsdale, AZ: Great Potential Press.

Possible responses

They Say...	You Say...
Ability grouping isn't a "picture" of the real world. Students need to learn to get along with others at all levels of ability.	Actually, as adults, we are grouped by the jobs we take, the amount of education we acquire, and we are most likely to group ourselves with others who are about as smart as we are and who share common interests with us. We rarely experience "mixed-ability" grouping in the adult world.
Ability-grouping is elitist and undemocratic.	If careful placement in groups has taken place, such that one's actual level of ability or performance is the major criterion for placement, then it is an equitable strategy. The point of being grouped is to be learning at the level one is capable of. One group is not "better" than another, just more appropriate for meeting specific educational needs. If one group gets a reputation as "better," then the school needs to deal with this additional issue.
The "good" teachers get the "good" students. The lower ability students get the "bad" teachers.	Being in the high achieving group does not mean the students are "good" or "better" than others-just different. Teacher selection is at issue here not grouping itself. Administrators should match teachers to the students with whom they work best. Why are inadequate teachers allowed to even be in the school system?

<p>Ability grouping removes role models that “at risk” students need to succeed.</p>	<p>Schunk and Bandura have shown that a person chooses a role model from those who they perceive to be similar to themselves in capability but who are experiencing some success. Rarely does a low achieving student choose a gifted child as his or her role model.</p>
<p>Ability grouping is racist.</p>	<p>The general tracking research has documented that there are significantly fewer than expected minority children (except Asians) in higher achieving groups and significantly more than expected minority children in lower achieving groups. This is not the fault of grouping or placement but may reflect how identification is being done. It may be more important to change the identification measures and procedures than to eliminate the groups themselves.</p>
<p>It’s rigid; once you’re in one group level, you can’t move up.</p>	<p>This doesn’t have to be the case with grouping by ability or achievement level. Regular monitoring of students’ progress can allow them to move from group to group within the school year as topics and units of instruction change.</p>
<p>Low-level students’ self-esteem is damaged, sometimes irreparably.</p>	<p>The Kulik studies have established that just the opposite is true. In low track classes, low ability students are less likely to be intimidated by the fast thinkers and will be afforded more chances to be called on and to answer questions.</p>
<p>Grouping is espoused only by the politically and socially powerful parents of high ability students.</p>	<p>Actually, the parents of gifted children are a lot less well-trained and less well-organized for advocacy than are parents of special education children. Parents of gifted children are often regular volunteers and supporters of the school and therefore may be seen to have a direct influence on school decisions. They have very little political power, as shown by the number of states in the U.S. which have no mandate that gifted children be served and which don’t require specialized training for teachers who work with children.</p>
<p>Without brighter students in a class, the quality of discussion goes way down.</p>	<p>Bright children are sent to school to be fully educated, not to act on behalf of the teacher or make a teacher’s life or discussion quality more positive. Their needs to learn are every bit as important as the needs of other children. To prevent them from leaving a classroom so that they can receive special needed services is an exploitation of their abilities for the benefit of the teacher and the rest of the class.</p>

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 the 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.)*

Associations/Organizations

Indiana Association for the Gifted

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

Indiana State Department of Education

<https://www.in.gov/doe/>

National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC)

<https://www.nagc.org/>

Center for Gifted Studies and Talent Development, Ball State University

<https://www.bsu.edu/academics/centersandinstitutes/giftedstudies>

The Davidson Institute for Talent Development

<http://www.davidsongifted.org/>

Gifted Homeschoolers Forum

<https://giftedhomeschoolers.org/>

Hoagies' Gifted Education Page

<http://www.hoagiesgifted.org/>

Johns Hopkins Center for Talented Youth (CTY)

<https://cty.jhu.edu/>

Northwestern's Center for Talent Development (CTD)

<https://www.ctd.northwestern.edu/>

Purdue University's Gifted Education Resource Institute (GERI)

<https://www.education.purdue.edu/geri/>

Stanford University's Education Program for Gifted Youth (EPGY)

<https://summerinstitutes.spcs.stanford.edu/>

Supporting Emotional Needs of the Gifted (SENG)

<http://www.sengifted.org/>

University of Iowa Center for Gifted Education and Talent Development
<https://www2.education.uiowa.edu/belinblank/>

World Council for Gifted and Talented Children
<https://www.world-gifted.org/>

Extension Resources – there are others, but here is a starter list

Royal Fireworks Press for Curricular Materials
<https://www.rfwp.com/product/problem-based-learning-units-by-shelagh-gallagher/#book-the-great-debates-teacher-manual>

Critical Thinking Press
<https://www.criticalthinking.com/>

Free Spirit Publishing
<https://www.freespirit.com/>

Prufrock Press
<https://www.routledge.com/go/prufrock-press>

MindWare
<http://www.mindware.orientaltrading.com/>

Podcasts, Twitter Feeds, Websites, Misc.

NeuroDiversity Podcast
<https://neurodiversitypodcast.com>

Denver Colorado District Twitter account
<https://twitter.com/JeffcoGifted>

Institute for Educational Advancement
<https://twitter.com/IEAgifted>

My Little Poppies
<https://my-little-poppies.com/category/giftedtwice-exceptional/>

Colorado Association for Gifted and Talented
<https://www.facebook.com/ColoAssoc4GT/>