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# The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented

## *Spring 2005 Newsletter*

### **NRC/GT: Exploring Beliefs About Students as Scholars, Apprentices, and Learners**

**E. Jean Gubbins**  
University of Connecticut  
Storrs, CT

The zeitgeist or “tenor” of the times influences schools’ policies and practices. All schools want to meet the academic needs of their students and to produce an educated citizenry. Attention to academic performance and accountability is evident as these two words are banner headlines in many education journals and newspapers. It is critical to monitor student progress carefully during the school year. As the school year draws to an end, educators often reflect on their students’ accomplishments. They think about students who struggled with concepts because their knowledge and skills were still building. It was obvious that students needed more background knowledge and time before they could apply the concepts. Educators also marvel at the academic accomplishments of young people who grasped abstract concepts easily and seemed to have a wealth of background knowledge and skills they readily transferred to new topics or concepts. It is obvious that students’ learning trajectories were different. Prior knowledge, experiences, academic motivation, and efficacy as learners have a variable effect on what students already know, what they want or need to learn, and how they illustrate their learning and understanding.

Would students who need more knowledge and time to understand concepts and those who grasp abstract concepts easily be referred to as scholars, apprentices, and learners? Or would the descriptions be judiciously applied? *Encarta* defines “student” as “somebody who has studied or takes a great interest in a particular subject.” Scholar, apprentice, and learner are listed as synonyms. Perhaps reflecting on this definition of student and the synonyms would be an interesting exercise. Would teachers’ expectations change? Would the classroom environment change as educators strive to develop the talents and abilities of young people? Think of 2 students that you know very well. How would you describe their academic accomplishments? What is the evidence that the students have studied or their work has indicated strong interest in a subject area? Questions such as these are valuable in reflecting on students’ performance.

Several years ago, Ann Arbor Public Schools (1993) created multiple approaches for documenting students’ performance. A very simplified adaptation of one matrix may serve as an efficient way to check your

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# Identifying and Serving Gifted and Talented Students

## Local Education Summit Simulation

Meghan Coates, Megan Dobyns, E. Jean Gubbins, Laura Kammerer,  
Kelly McCabe, Shauna Miller, Valerie Pare, & Rose Traceski  
University of Connecticut  
Storrs, CT

*This Local Educational Summit Simulation is an opportunity to analyze your district's perspectives about identifying and serving gifted and talented students. Read the simulation and reflect on the questions. After reading the study group's statements, review the key points and take time to respond to the discussion questions. By the end of the simulation, you will have created your own Local Educational Summit. Next Step: Developing an Action Plan: Identifying and Serving Gifted and Talented Students!*

### Setting the Stage

*Lakeview* educators are addressing basic questions as part of their local education summit. Administrators and teachers in *Lakeview* made great strides in revamping many of their programs and services by establishing study groups. The new superintendent of schools is committed to an educational system that is responsive to the academic needs of students. In the past, *Lakeview* was somewhat complacent about experimenting with new initiatives. Educators and parents alike agreed that students were doing well in school and many of the young people were pursuing advanced educational options upon graduation from high school. This educational marker was considered important. The superintendent wanted to challenge the complacency that was evident from discussions with principals and teachers. A self-study of their school district revealed several questions that needed attention to meet their district's goal in their mission statement: "We want the students in *Lakeview* to reach their potential." Several districts often use this statement or similar ones included below as educators craft the philosophical underpinnings of their educational system. As mission statements, they highlight the need to provide multiple opportunities and challenges to young people to become intellectually strong and lifelong learners. They all stress the importance of developing academic, affective, and artistic potentials in a diverse and changing nation and world.

All students are offered multiple opportunities and challenges to grow intellectually, socially, and physically. The educational program provides the foundation for all students to become creative, critical thinkers and lifelong learners. (*Student/Parent Handbook and Calendar of Events*, Windham High School, Windham, CT)

The Hartford Public School System must be a community of active learners that nurtures self-confidence, respect and excellence in all its members. Within such a community all students:

- Master communication, computation, analytical and problem solving skills
- Develop their physical and artistic potential
- Acquire strong ethical values
- Learn to act creatively, responsibly, and effectively in meeting the challenges of a diverse and changing world. (Hartford, CT Public Schools)

Underlying the town of Mansfield's school program is the philosophy that education should provide for the maximum development of each student. (Mansfield, CT Public Schools)

The Glastonbury Public Schools, in partnership with the entire community, prepare students in a safe, supportive, and dynamic environment to think critically, communicate effectively, and act ethically and responsibly.

We believe in the value of education for every child. We challenge each student to reach his or her potential and become a productive citizen of our technological, diverse, and global community. (Glastonbury Public Schools)

Once codified, *Lakeview* educators agreed that mission statements, such as those above, must be studied carefully to determine how they will be activated. They realize that each mission statement has implicit and explicit messages. *Lakeview* educators support the viewpoint of multiple potentials in young people and are exploring ways to achieve their educational agenda by conducting this local education summit simulation.

### **Educating Our Children**

How should our children be educated? At first, this question sounds very simple. If we posed it to people, to what extent would there be agreement about educating young people? Over the last two decades, several professional organizations developed standards of knowledge and skills to stimulate discussions among professional educators and to provide guidance for the perennial question: What should students know, understand, and be able to do? Knowing, understanding, and doing require different levels of accomplishments in a world in which the explosion of knowledge is mind-boggling.

We want all children to be exposed to content areas, concepts, and skills that will allow them to read, write, compute, synthesize, analyze, think independently and originally, creative problem-solve, self-motivated, and enjoy academic challenges. Are children relearning what they already know or are they learning new information and skills? One way to explore questions about educating children is to convene a study group charged with the responsibility of addressing this broad question about education.

### **Study Group on Meeting the Needs of Students With High Abilities**

In response to the superintendent's request to establish a study group to discuss how to meet the needs of gifted and talented students, group members posed two questions to focus their work.

1. Why is it important to identify our most talented and gifted students?
2. Will bright students do well academically without any additional curricular opportunities?

The study group shared several sources to provide a common background of information about students' talents and abilities. Each person also reviewed lists of characteristics of bright students and found that several were repeated in multiple sources. According to Davis and Rimm (2004), the characteristics include the following:

- Inquisitive
- High curiosity
- Early and rapid learning
- Rapid language development as a child
- Aware of social issues
- Active-leader, offers help, eager to be involved. (p. 33)

Winner (1996) offers additional characteristics that describe the preferences of gifted and talented children, including:

Social Aspects:

- solitary play
- preference for company of older children

Affective Aspects:

- philosophical and moral concerns
- humor
- experiences of awe. (p. 30)

As the study group discussed each of these characteristics, they reflected on the importance of identifying gifted and talented students. The superintendent remarked at the richness of the discussions and thought it might be helpful for each person to prepare written responses to the questions above. The group agreed and offered their responses at the next study group meeting.

### **Perspectives on Meeting the Needs of High Ability Students**

Seven educators prepared written statements and presented them to the study group. As you read each statement below, think about the words and ideas that resonate with your professional and personal perspectives on learning and teaching. Mark relevant statements in each response. At the end of your review process, summarize what you have learned and describe your action plan to meet specific objectives about the need to identify and serve students with high potential.

#### **Statement #1: Recognizing Students' Varying Abilities**

Kelly McCabe emphasizes the importance of recognizing the varying abilities of students and the need to provide educational experiences responsive to such differences. He stresses the importance of creating multiple educational offerings for students, rather than making one approach “fit all.”

#### **Kelly McCabe**

Students have different ability levels. With these different ability levels come different needs and potential. Schools must be fair in granting students opportunities. But fair does not mean giving the exact same educational opportunities to all students. Fairness is providing the best opportunities for all students based on their needs. Without measuring students' abilities and identifying those with special gifts, it is impossible to develop their talents properly.

It is intuitive to some people that different abilities necessitate different educational approaches. Teaching the same way to students with different gifts and learning styles is sure to be ineffective for high and low achieving students. To anyone who follows this line of reasoning without further explanation, the debate is over. To establish which students will need enrichment opportunities, some measurement is necessary. The best means of identification can be debated, but the importance of identifying gifted students should not.

Other people may be more reluctant to identify talented and gifted students. They may not believe in identification of gifted and talented learners and use their opinions as supporting arguments. This is where the empirical evidence supporting the need to identify and nurture gifted students can be used as a convincing argument (Borland, 1989; Coleman & Cross, 2001; Rogers, 2002). The success of students identified as gifted and given appropriate acceleration and enrichment opportunities and the struggles of gifted students denied challenges indicate that identification is essential to the well being of our gifted youth (Southern & Jones, 1991).

First, the problems with not identifying students should be presented. Renzulli and Park (2000) studied 3,520 gifted students. Alarming, 5% of these students dropped out of school after eighth grade. This was almost as high as the 5.2% dropout rate of non-gifted students. This sheds some light on the extent to which gifted students' needs are not being met. Without proper identification, there is no plausible way to better meet such needs. Young people with

specific talents are not denied further challenges due to their age, and we do not hesitate to identify the most gifted in other fields. Stevie Wonder was a musical prodigy and hit recording artist at the age of 12. Midori made her first debut as a violinist at 11 years old at the New York Philharmonic. Moses Malone, Kevin Garnett, and LeBron James are athletes who have made an impact on the professional level before the age of 20 (Thornburg, 2005). At age 13, Michelle Kwan won first place at the United States Olympic Festival. If people recognize other gifted youth, the same logic leads to the conclusion that gifted students need to be identified and have their talents appreciated.

The problems with a lack of identification and the parallels that can be drawn to other youth should start to explain how recognizing gifted students is necessary. To further support this idea, there is a wealth of evidence demonstrating the success of enrichment and accelerated programs. *A Nation Deceived: How Schools Hold Back America's Brightest Students* (Colangelo, Assouline, & Gross, 2004) provides ample evidence of the benefits of acceleration (for which identification is obviously necessary). The report states: "Students who are accelerated do extremely well academically after they skip. On achievement tests, bright accelerated students perform just as well as bright, older non-accelerated students (p. 20). Accelerated students surpass the scores of their gifted age-mates who were not accelerated.

It is clear that from an achievement standpoint, there is a strong case to be made for identification and acceleration. The perceived drawbacks are the social implications. Again, there is evidence that students identified as gifted will benefit socially or will not be significantly impacted in a negative way. Colangelo, Assouline, and Gross (2004) stated that 63% of students identified as gifted and granted early entrance adjusted "relatively well" or "very well" according to their teachers.

Many of the previous arguments made for identification of gifted students deal as much with acceleration and enrichment. It is worth noting again that these opportunities must be preceded by proper identification. Granting gifted students enrichment and acceleration enhances their academic experience (Gallagher & Gallagher, 1994; Maker, 1983). Without these, gifted students will not get the opportunities they need. Since accurate identification is the key to planning a gifted program, identification is an essential aspect of education.

Hypothetically, bright students should be able to do well, even without additional opportunities. The data linking enrichment and acceleration to higher achievement indicates that bright students may not do as well without additional opportunities (Reis & McCoach, 2000; Siegle & McCoach, 2005). But many should still do better than their non-

#### ***Statement #1: Key Points***

1. Gifted youth in other fields are identified (sports, music), and so should intellectually gifted students.
2. Many studies suggest that gifted and talented students who receive acceleration and enrichment are more successful than those who are denied such opportunities.
3. Besides research linking acceleration and enrichment to positive outcomes, there is evidence that not meeting gifted students' needs will hinder their development.

#### ***Statement #1: Discussion Questions***

1. Do you agree that educators want to be fair in offering educational opportunities?
2. Does that mean that all students must have the exact same opportunities?
3. How do sound identification procedures inform curricular options?

gifted peers. This may depend on their personalities, however. Renzulli (1978) describes task commitment as a trait of gifted students. Among the other characteristics listed by Davis and Rimm (2004) are motivation and high ambitions, as well as the more obvious quality of superior general ability. If students possessed these traits, it would make sense for them to do well in almost any situation. They may not gain as much from an experience, but their achievement level will remain high.

### Statements #2 & #3: Seeing Both Sides of Arguments: Janus Perspective

Valerie Pare and Rose Traceski point to contrasting viewpoints about meeting the needs of students who are gifted and talented. Do you remember Janus the Roman god who is depicted with two faces looking in opposite directions? How can you be fair and vigilant about how students will be educated in your district? Let's see what Valerie Pare and Rose Traceski say about educating young people. Which views need to be studied further in your district?

#### Valerie Pare

Perceptions, views, and treatment of gifted and talented students have varied throughout our history. Depending on the time period and culture of society, different talents are valued and different services to nurture these "gifts" are provided. Two common, yet contrasting viewpoints exist regarding gifted education in American culture today: one is that gifted and talented students must be nurtured in our school systems to produce educated professionals within our society; the second viewpoint is that gifted students do not require special services because they already have an advantage over all other peers. With these two generalized opinions in mind, we can begin to understand the conflicting arguments that people may have when asked their opinions of issues surrounding gifted and talented education today.

Many people believe it is important to formally identify our most talented and gifted before services can be rendered. Students who are gifted and talented have educational needs that often cannot be met in undifferentiated classroom environments (Gubbins et al., 2002). Many people may be surprised to learn that while identification of gifted and talented students is required by law in many states, some states do not require these identified students to receive specialized instruction or enriched curriculum. Many people would assume that there was a purpose to the identification of gifted and talented students, beyond a label. Some states mandate that students identified as gifted and talented are provided curricula tailored to their academic needs, but whether schools have the resources necessary to provide these special services is a different challenge.

People who do not support the process of identifying gifted and talented students resent that these students may be offered exclusive educational experiences that are richer and more valuable. *National Excellence: A Case for Developing America's Talent* (United States Department of Education, 1993) proclaims that all students should be expected to work hard, to be challenged, and to master more complex material (Reis, Burns, & Renzulli, 1992; Reis et al., 1993). American society is more apt to encourage challenges for students of low and average ability, and much less likely to encourage additional challenges of more advanced students. Sometimes teachers feel pressured to cater to struggling students and to ignore the needs of gifted students.

While it may be true that some gifted students will succeed in the classroom without any additional opportunities, it does not necessarily imply that these students will benefit from such classrooms. Oftentimes these students are exposed to material that they have already mastered 1 or 2 years prior, so it is obvious why they would get high marks in school and

appear academically successful. As a result, some gifted students will never be challenged, and may grow accustomed to mastering material without needing to put forth any real effort. This will inevitably create problems when these students attend college and are exposed to material that they do not understand right from the start. It is important to continuously challenge students to grapple with interesting, complex, and abstract ideas, and develop problem solving strategies throughout engagement in the process. Some gifted students will not be able to succeed in school because they do not see the value of putting forth effort towards material they already understand (Siegle & McCoach, 2005). Some students grow apathetic towards school and become lazy and unmotivated because they are not being challenged enough.

### Rose Traceski

In this country, not everyone believes it is important to identify gifted and talented students. However, of those who do think there is a need to identify exceptional students, there are two dominant opinions. The first group of people believes our nation's gifted and talented students need to be identified because these students are the ones who will become our future and part of the educated citizenry. Therefore, they should be identified simply to keep track of them. A second group of people believes exceptional students should be identified as they have special needs, requiring extra services above and beyond the normal classroom curriculum. Therefore, students need to be identified to find out who qualifies for these services (Colangelo & Davis, 2003; Coleman & Cross, 2001).

The first group mentioned above does not see the need to offer gifted and talented students special services. Although this group of people does not advocate gifted programs, they do still feel the need to have the gifted and talented students identified. This is simply so that these children can be viewed as examples of the reservoir of talent in the United States. This attitude is supported by the fact that only 21 states have mandates and funding for gifted education. Fifteen states do not have any mandates about providing gifted programs (Council of State Directors for the Gifted, 2001). Among states without a mandate for programs and services there may be a mandate to identify the gifted and talented students. These policies promote the idea that gifted students should be identified but not served.

The second group of people believes that gifted and talented students should be identified precisely because they need to be served. Renzulli and Reis (1997) propose that the area in which a student has superior potential should have maximum opportunities for learning and development. Reis et al. (1993) found that some gifted elementary students mastered the curriculum before the school year began. These learning opportunities are not being provided in the regular curriculum. Therefore, this group of people sees a clear need for special services for the gifted. However, it is impossible

#### *Statements #2 & #3: Key Points*

1. All students should be expected to work hard, to be challenged, and to master complex material—for gifted students, these challenges most often come from enrichment programs.
2. Without being adequately challenged, gifted students may fail to realize that meaningful learning does not always come easily.
3. Gifted students from the United States perform poorly in several academic subjects when compared to their global counterparts.

#### *Statements #2 & #3: Discussion Questions*

1. To what extent do you recognize the Janus perspectives in your district?
2. Do you aim for academic adequacy or academic excellence?
3. What does academic excellence mean?

to provide these services to the gifted and talented students without a sound approach to identification.

The two views differ greatly in their motives for identifying the gifted and talented in our school systems. Although both want the gifted and talented to be identified, the effects of the motives on the students are radically different. Differing viewpoints also exist regarding the impact of programs and services to meet students' academic needs.

The second group of people referred to above contends that gifted and talented students suffer negative consequences if there are no enrichment or acceleration opportunities offered. Renzulli said gifted students should be "producers of knowledge rather than mere consumers of existing information" as is the case in many mainstream classrooms (Renzulli, 1988). Without specific programs and services for gifted students, advanced children are not challenged to do their best work and to live up to their potential. As a result, gifted students from the United States perform poorly when compared to those from around the world. As the *National Excellence* report (United States Department of Education, 1993) states, "The United States is squandering one of its most precious resources—the gifts, talents, and high interests of many of its students" (p. 1). The school system in the United States only wants students to "aim for academic adequacy, not academic excellence," (p. 1). Without the push and encouragement for this excellence, our gifted and talented students are being "left in the dust."

Besides leaving our country behind others in the world, the second group would claim that a lack of gifted services has negative effects on individual students. Students have lost enthusiasm for education. Gifted students may develop poor study skills, since they do not need to study during their years in the public school system (Reis & McCoach, 2000). Other students suffer from low self-esteem when they finally come across a challenge in their work or a failure because they were not taught to cope with these unfamiliar experiences (Neihart, Reis, Robinson, & Moon, 2001). These are just some of the many negative consequences that people cite to support the view that gifted and talented students need special programs and services.

Our country is still split on both of these issues. Each side argues its point of view with passion and conviction. Russo, Harris, and Ford (1996) sum it up well when they state, "Supporters see gifted education as a *right*, the unaffected see it as a *privilege*, and opponents see it as *superfluous*" (cited at Davis & Rimm, 2005, p. 76).

#### **Statement #4: Recognizing Academic Needs of Students**

At best, learning is a complicated process that we do not fully understand. We observe it, encourage it, and measure it to understand the varying talents and abilities of students. Shauna Miller contends that it is important to recognize students' academic needs.

#### **Shauna Miller**

Much of the focus in schools these days seems to be on special education students and providing services for them. This is a very necessary and worthy focus because educators and parents want all children to learn as much as possible. In the classroom, many teachers are taught or told to "teach to the middle" to reach the most students. What about gifted and talented students? What about the students who sit in classrooms waiting for classmates to learn things they have already mastered? If we truly want all children to receive the best schooling and learn as much as possible, then we must identify gifted children and educate them as well.



In many schools, children are heterogeneously grouped; addressing multiple levels of intelligence is not the main focus. What many people do not realize is that this system hampers students with advanced abilities and students who struggle with the grade level curriculum (Rogers, 2002). It is not fair to make a child sit in a classroom in which the content is too complex and abstract; it is not fair for a gifted child to sit in a classroom where learning anything new will not happen until the second half of the year (Reis et al., 1993).

When gifted children's talents are not recognized and supported, interest in school declines. Some just sit quietly in their seats doing their work on autopilot; others act out or drop out "intellectually." Very commonly, and unfortunately, unchallenged gifted students underachieve (Siegle & McCoach, 2005). Gifted and talented students need special learning opportunities that challenge their abilities (Gubbins et al., 2002).

Without such challenges, these students will never realize their full potential. According to Renzulli (1988), there are two purposes for providing special opportunities for gifted students. "The first purpose is to provide young people with maximum opportunities for self-fulfillment . . ." and the second is to ". . . increase society's supply of persons who will help to solve the problems of contemporary civilization by becoming producers of knowledge and art rather than mere consumers of existing information" (Renzulli, 1988, p. 20). To conclude in support of identifying and providing services for gifted children, Colangelo asserts: "If the work is not challenging enough for these high-ability kids, they will become invisible . . . . We will lose them. We already are" (cited in Thornburg, 2004, p. 56).

### Statements #5 & #6: Waiting to Learn: Educated Citizenry of the Future

Educators study the past to guide their current approaches to educating young people. Today's children will create the future of our nation, which is a huge responsibility. Megan Dobyms reminds us that we educate children, not just provide "seat time" regulated by school calendars. Laura Kammerer concurs and wonders what happens to students who sit in silence "waiting to learn."

#### Megan Dobyms

Identifying our most talented and gifted students is incredibly important if we hope to cultivate our country's most valuable resource. Many people criticize gifted education as unfair and elitist (Gallagher & Gallagher, 1994). On the contrary, not identifying gifted children so that proper programming can be provided is unfair to children who need the special programming, as well as the society that will ultimately benefit from cultivating their potential (Colangelo & Davis, 2003; Renzulli, 1988). No one wins when our educational system does not match the needs of our diverse population of students.

#### *Statement #4: Key Points*

1. Students with advanced abilities should be in classrooms where the focus is on material they have yet to master.
2. When gifted students are not supported in their school system, interest in school declines.
3. Gifted students often have the potential to be "producers of knowledge" and should not merely be treated as "consumers of existing information."

#### *Statement #4: Discussion Questions*

1. Are gifted and talented students becoming invisible in your district?
2. Who were the top performing students in elementary and middle schools?
3. How are they performing in high school?
4. Why is it important to recognize students' academic abilities?
5. Is school an obstacle to learning?

In America, we hope to treat everyone equitably, and this desire extends into our educational system:

Our democratic system promises each person—regardless of racial, cultural, or economic background and regardless of sex or condition that is disabling—the opportunity to develop as an individual as far as that person’s talents and motivation will permit. (Davis & Rimm, 2004, p. 2)

Not all children are average; some need special programming to meet their particular needs. As the typical American school is today, most classrooms aim their teaching and curriculum to the average student, leaving out low- and high-ability learners. To deny high-ability students the right to programming they need to reach their potential is as unfair as it would be to deny the rights of low-ability students who also need special education programming. No one sees special education programming as a privilege; special education is viewed by society as a response to students’ needs. For gifted and talented students, identification and subsequent programming is critical to their learning.

Opponents of gifted education maintain that identification and programming is also unfair because “White middle-class and Asian students tend to be overrepresented in gifted and talented programs, while African American, Hispanic, and poor students tend to be underrepresented” (Davis & Rimm, 2004, p. 2). Many people find it unfair that additional resources are allotted to the children who already have many opportunities and resources at home. However, while it is true that there is an overrepresentation of these populations, not all gifted children come from these populations. Students currently in gifted programs come from all ethnic, racial, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Presently, adjustments are being made to identification strategies that will allow gifted programs to be more inclusive than exclusive. Some identification models that are already in place (Colangelo & Davis, 2003; Gallagher & Gallagher, 1994; Maker, 1983; Renzulli & Reis, 1997; Rogers, 2002) reduce what many see as “elitism.” Hopefully, one day gifted and talented programs will be able to reach all the high-ability students who need them.

Many critics of gifted education argue that gifted children by definition will love school and do well academically whether or not they are identified or have extra opportunities. Therefore, why should schools spend extra money on unnecessary additional resources? This argument is a myth. Quite to the contrary, without the proper challenge in the classroom, gifted and talented children often develop behavioral problems and/or become underachievers. One study has shown that “10 to 20 percent of high school dropouts are in the tested gifted range” (Davis & Rimm, 2004, p. 3). In addition, a report by the National Commission on Excellence in Education, *A Nation at Risk*, documented that “over half the population of gifted students do not match their tested ability with comparable achievement in school” (cited in Davis & Rimm, 2004, p. 3). Children who do not develop behavioral problems or become underachievers still experience an educational experience that is very frustrating, as they are not appropriately challenged. In a recent article in *Time* magazine, Thornburg (2004) reported Jan Davidson as having remarked, “When we ask exceptional children about their main obstacle, they almost always say it’s their school . . . Their school makes them put in seat time, and they can’t learn at their own ability level” (p. 56).

The United States Department of Education’s 1993 report, *National Excellence: A Case for Developing America’s Talent* explains that the term “gifted” is not a “mature power” but

a “developing ability.” Notice the language used in the following definition of children with outstanding talent:

Children and youth with outstanding talent perform or show the potential for performing at remarkably high levels of accomplishment . . . . These children and youth exhibit high performance capability in intellectual, creative, and/or artistic areas . . . . (United States Department of Education, 1993, p. 26)

According to this definition, it is clear that giftedness is a potential ability that needs to be cultivated and developed for these students to reach their true potential. The fact that so many gifted students either never reach their potential and that school becomes a frustrating experience for the children who manage to remain motivated to learn is evidence of the importance of identification and special programming.

### Laura Kammerer

Why is it a necessity to identify our most talented and gifted students? There are many reasons, but perhaps most importantly, because all children have the right to receive an education that fulfills their needs. Gifted students need modifications in the general education curriculum. Davis and Rimm (2004) stated, “It is unfair to them to ignore, or worse, to prevent the development of their special skills and abilities and to depress their educational aspirations and eventual career achievements” (p. 2). Without proper identification, gifted students often fall victim to the same fate as other special needs students who are improperly placed in a general education classroom—frustration, anger, depression, behavior issues, and often dropping out of school.

Identifying gifted students has outcomes that benefit all people. Of course, we know that gifted students will be positively impacted by an enriching and challenging educational experience. But what about the rest of us? What must be remembered is that these bright and talented kids are indeed the future of this nation.

As stated in *National Excellence: A Case for Developing America’s Talent*, “In order to make economic strides, America must rely upon many of its top-performing students to provide leadership—in mathematics, science, writing, politics, dance, art, business, history, health and other human pursuits” (p. 1). Without proper identification of gifted and talented students, America will continue to lag behind the rest of the world in academic achievement and standards for children.

Some people argue that gifted students do not need or deserve any additional opportunities because they will do well without the “extras.” That certainly may be true in some cases. Many gifted kids do get through general education and do well. They may be happy and fulfilled with the help of their parents providing them with enriching activities outside of school.

### *Statements #5 & #6: Key Points*

1. Schools often aim to teach curriculum to meet the needs of average students, and subsequently leave out the needs of low and high ability students.
2. Some students underachieve when their school does not challenge them appropriately.
3. Giftedness is a “developing ability” and must be cultivated to maximize a student’s potential.

### *Statements #5 & #6: Discussion Questions*

1. What is the difference between “seat time” and “learning time?”
2. How do high school graduates assess their quality of their educational experiences?
3. To what extent do graduates view themselves as part of the educated citizenry?
4. Are students disengaged or suffering in silence because they are not challenged in school?

However, what about the majority of gifted students who feel unheard, frustrated and bored in general education classrooms? Do educators have the right to ignore the fact that they need to be challenged? The answer is no!

Gifted and talented students are not doing well when denied the opportunity to work to their potential. Imagine a child being given worksheet after worksheet of addition when she is capable of algebra. How long will it be before she tunes out during math class? Maybe she will be able to sit quietly and suffer in silence. However, it is more likely that she will disengage completely, develop resentment toward school, or begin to have behavior problems as a result of boredom (Rogers, 2002).

As a country, the United States must stop stigmatizing gifted youth and begin to embrace their differences just as it has with other types of learners. The perceived “additional opportunities” that anger some have to be redefined as necessities for equal education for bright students.

### **Statement #7: Standing Up for Your Beliefs About Educating Young People**

To what extent do educators’ beliefs and practices match in theory and practice? Meghan Coates presents a perspective that will promote dialogue. Reflecting on practices and interpreting what is done in classrooms is critical to improving educational opportunities for young people.

#### **Meghan Coates**

All people are different, and equality is achieved by providing for those differences. In Vonnegut’s (1992) short story “Harrison Bergeron,” a society tries to achieve equality through various means: hanging weights on the most graceful dancers and muddling the thoughts of intelligent people by playing disruptive sounds through ear pieces. Everyone is equalized in that no one is using their gifts and no one stands out. Forcing all children to sit in the same classrooms doing the same activities at the same time is on par with this scenario. Why aren’t gifted students, another special population, defended with the same vigor?

Identification of gifted students is essential to see who would most benefit from special services. In many cases, the identification process provides opportunities to locate those students who hide their talents and those bright students who are achieving at a level well below their capabilities. The label will aid some students in adequately adjusting their expectations of themselves. To those who believe that labeling gifted students enables them to act inappropriately—consider that grouping them with similar ability peers may have a humbling effect (Rogers, 2002). Allowing these students to recognize and embrace their abilities is important for their future as well as ours!

All students deserve an education that corresponds to their capabilities, and this is a reasonable expectation with or without the support of law. The charge to education is to address student needs in the interest of maximizing learning. It is especially important to challenge gifted students for several reasons. High performing students, and gifted students frequently base their self-concept on academic successes. Without educational challenges, students may associate being smart with effortless success (Coleman & Cross, 2001). Students who do not value themselves as learners and thinkers will

#### ***Statement #7: Key Points***

1. Identification provides opportunities to students who would otherwise hide their talents or underachieve.
2. High performing students often base their self-concept on academic successes.
3. In September, gifted and talented students have mastered nearly half of the year-long curriculum.

struggle. What happens when they confront new and challenging material? Reis et al. (1993) declared that many of these students don't learn anything truly novel until January, and other recent studies show that, "gifted and talented elementary students have mastered from 35 to 50 percent of the curriculum to be offered in the five basic subjects before they begin the school year" (United States Department of Education, 1993, p. 2). Letting students stagnate is setting them up for failure.

It is especially important to challenge young minds because the consequences may be unfortunate and obvious. Boredom can easily lead to misbehavior, as well as perpetually lower effort put into schoolwork.

Students who are not challenged may develop poor study habits, since they do not need them to succeed with unchallenging work. It is time to combat America's love-hate relationship with bright people and start building our future by supporting all of our students.

### ***Statement #7: Discussion Questions***

1. How does the lack of academic challenge impact young people?
2. How can we nurture and develop the talents and abilities of all students?
3. What is our responsibility in helping children learn what they do not know rather than re-learning what they have already mastered?

### **Closing Comments**

Megan Dobyns and Shauna Miller offer closing comments on educating children. Their comments should promote more reflection on the two questions raised for this simulation. Asking and answering questions such as these will help each school district to examine beliefs and practices.

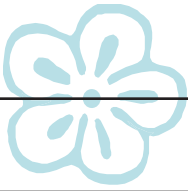
- Why is it important to identify our most talented and gifted students?
- Will bright students do well academically without any additional curricular opportunities?

Our children should be educated in learning environments that provide academic rigor to all and the appropriate scaffolding and challenge for all to achieve their individual potentials. The achievement of individual potentials should be an expectation in all classrooms, with an acknowledgement that all students have different ability levels and different potentials. Learning environments should not require mere regurgitation of somebody else's ideas, but encourage original, creative and analytic thinking in all students. (Megan Dobyns)

Our children should be educated in a manner that takes into account each child's abilities and interests. All children should be supported in their efforts to reach their full potential. Students with learning difficulties should be accommodated and encouraged so as to not be left behind. To ensure the development of their abilities, students who are gifted and talented, should also be accommodated and encouraged. Each student, regardless of ability, needs to be given the knowledge and tools to reach his or her full potential. (Shauna Miller)

### **Developing an Action Plan**

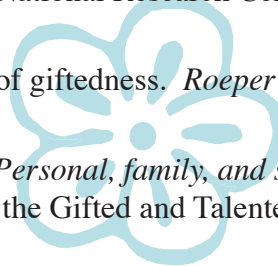
The Local Education Summit Simulation offers an opportunity to study professional and personal perspectives of others interested in identifying and serving gifted and talented students. After thoroughly reviewing the key points and responding to the discussion questions, it is time to ask: What's next? Use the Action Plan form that follows to summarize what you have learned that is most relevant to your school district. Then document your district's Action Plan by listing specific objectives and the person/persons who will complete required tasks. Consult the references listed below and The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented website ([www.gifted.uconn.edu](http://www.gifted.uconn.edu)) for research-based practices that will help you create a sound, defensible plan for identifying and serving gifted and talented students.

<b>Action Plan: Identifying and Serving Gifted and Talented Students</b>		
	<b>Describe relevance to your school district.</b>	<b>Describe your Action Plan. List specific objectives.</b>
<b>Statement #1: Recognizing Students' Varying Abilities</b>		
<b>Statements #2 &amp; #3: Seeing Both Sides of Arguments: Janus Perspective</b>		
<b>Statements #4: Challenging Students Academically</b>		
<b>Statements #5 &amp; #6: Waiting to Learn: Educated Citizenry of the Future</b>		
<b>Statement #7: Standing Up for Your Beliefs About Educating Young People</b>		

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(continued from page 1)

knowledge and beliefs about students' performance. Remember students are scholars, apprentices, and learners. Consider using this matrix to rate students' progress throughout the year.

Student name	Students who are developing the outcome.	Students who understand and can apply the outcome.
Antoine	X	→ X
Belinda		X
Travis		X
Conner	X	

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**Editor:**

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**Editorial Board:**

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Siamak Vahidi



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