

## Why Students Underachieve: What Educators and Parents Can Do about It

### The Definition & Meaning of Being Gifted

Children who are gifted are defined as those who demonstrate an advanced ability or potential in one or more specific areas when compared to others of the same age, experience or environment. These gifted individuals excel in their ability to think, reason and judge, making it necessary for them to receive special educational services and support to be able to fully develop their potential and talents.

Gifted children come from all different racial and ethnic backgrounds, as well as economic status. While no two gifted children are the same, many share common gifted characteristics and traits, such as:

Advanced thinking and comprehension above their age peers

Emotional intensity at a young age

Heightened sense of self awareness

Highly developed curiosity

Excellent memory

### Defining Gifted

There are many definitions of giftedness, none of which are universally agreed upon. Depending on the context, definitions often guide and influence key decisions in schools such as determining the eligibility and criteria for gifted education programs and services, what areas of giftedness will be addressed (e.g., specific abilities in a subject area such as math), and when the services will be offered. As parents of gifted students or professionals who work with gifted children, it is important to understand the different definitions and what they mean in order to provide the appropriate guidance and support needed for social-emotional development.

### State Definitions of Giftedness

Gifted definitions with respect to students in schools vary from state to state. Most states will base their definition of giftedness on a comparison to others of the same age or by needs that are not provided by the regular classroom. Some states have certain criteria for gifted identification. In the case of Illinois, for example, gifted students are considered gifted and talented if they score in the top 5% locally in any area of aptitude, specifically in language arts and mathematics. However, not all states require that school districts follow the state definition.

For more information, see a list of state definitions of giftedness provided by NAGC (National Association for Gifted Children).

## Federal Definition of Giftedness

According to NAGC's article on Definitions of Giftedness, "the term gifted and talented means students, children, or youth who give evidence of high achievement capability in such areas as intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership capacity, or in specific academic fields, and who need services or activities not ordinarily provided by the school in order to fully develop those capabilities."

## What Classifies a Child as Gifted?

At a basic level, children are classified as gifted if they demonstrate a high degree of intellectual ability(ies). Typically, identification can be done through a combination of gifted tests and assessments. Because the federal government does not mandate gifted programs in schools, the criteria for giftedness depends on which state you live in, which school district you are in, etc.

In many cases, tests are used to determine whether a child is gifted or not since performance compared to peers is an important way of gauging a child's academic abilities. These may include achievement tests such as the ACT or the Woodcock Johnson Tests of Achievement. Assessments by professionals may also be used for gifted identification—they are more costly but much more comprehensive. This method involves determining the child's strengths, challenges, learning style and educational needs. They often include intelligence quotient (IQ) tests such as the Stanford-Binet or the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC).

## What is the IQ of a Gifted Child?

The majority of the population will fall within an IQ of 85 to 115. The mean, or average, IQ is 100. A gifted child's IQ will fall within these ranges:

Mildly gifted: 115 to 130

Moderately gifted: 130 to 145

Highly gifted: 145 to 160

Profoundly gifted: 160 or higher

These gifted IQ ranges are based on a standard bell curve. However, different IQ tests may influence this range as some test ceilings cap at 145. Additionally, different gifted professionals have used other terms, such as "exceptionally" gifted. While a universal consensus on these ranges and labels may not be reached, it is understood that students who deviate from the average IQ of 100 require special educational accommodations to meet their needs.

Is Giftedness a Disability?

Giftedness is not considered a disability, although some gifted students may also have learning disabilities such as dyslexia, ADHD, or autism disorder. These students are known as twice-exceptional students (also known as 2e children or students). Identification of these students often requires a professional who is able to assess and identify the two areas of exceptionality which can often mask one another, making identification more difficult. Because of their unique abilities and characteristics, 2e students require a special combination of educational programs and support.

Does Giftedness Go Away?

Giftedness does not go away. However, a gifted child's gifts and talents may be suppressed or go unnoticed. This may be caused by inaccurate identification or "masking" when a child hides behind certain aspects of their giftedness that may cause them not to be identified. Here are some gifted characteristics that can make identification difficult:

Asynchronous Development

Asynchronous development refers to uneven development. In the case of gifted children, many perform at a high level in one or more areas but they may be functioning at a much lower level socially and emotionally. Children who are gifted may act immature for their ability.

Lack of Study Skills

Gifted children often struggle later in school because they tend to have poor study skills. They may pass through

elementary and middle school without having to study much but once they enter high school and college, gifted students may not be equipped to handle the rigors of higher-level course work.

#### Underachievement

Gifted students may show great academic promise but still perform below what is expected based on the child's ability. There are many causes as to why gifted students may underachieve. Some of the reasons include:

Special needs or twice exceptionality

Lack of motivation

Psychological issues such as perfectionism and anxiety

Depression

Intervention is often needed to reverse gifted underachievement. It is important to work with the gifted child to figure out what exactly is causing underachievement. If the child is not being challenged adequately, focus on cultivating the child's strengths and talents. Counseling services can also be helpful, allowing the child to confide in someone they can trust. Parents must also work with teachers to understand the learning styles and preferences of the gifted learner and challenge them to maximize their potential.

#### How Do You Support Gifted Children?

Gifted children need support for both academic and social-emotional development. The traditional classroom can be a poor fit if gifted students aren't challenged appropriately. That's why it's important to look to gifted services in your local area. Depending on where you live and which school district you are in, this might include ability grouping, gifted pull-out classes or access to gifted public schools. Outside of school, gifted programs may offer gifted students the chance to further explore a unique subject of interest, or they can provide a place to form social connections with intellectually-similar peers. Check out our article on gifted education for more information on education and support options available.

Resources for Gifted Children

Want to learn more about a gifted topic? Our resource library offers free gifted articles, guides, research and more to help inform and support gifted students and their families. To help you get started, here are some articles you may be interested in:

## Reference

[Lesson Plans: The Institutional Demands of Becoming a Teacher \(Critical Issues in American Education\)](#)

[Confirmatory Factor Analysis for Applied Research, First Edition \(Methodology in the Social Sciences\)](#)