

Myths

There are many myths surrounding gifted students and gifted education. These myths are born out of misunderstandings, misinformation, or a lack of education. Each of these myths makes it more difficult for genuinely gifted child to be identified and given the services they need and deserve.

These are a collection of such myths. They are provided to help you better understand gifted students. If you can think of any to add to our collection please send them to the Office of Gifted Programs so that they can be added to our list.

Myth: Gifted students have it made. They will succeed in life no matter what. They will survive with the regular curriculum and do not need any special services or advanced classes.

Fact: This is simply not true. We all could benefit from help as we develop our knowledge, abilities, and strengths. Just because it seems that a student has everything going for him/her does not mean that they cannot benefit from the expertise and challenges of others. Gifted students still need to be educated, nurtured, and supported as they work to reach their full potential.

Myth: Gifted students are equally gifted and mature in all areas of their life. This includes academics, emotional development, social interactions, and physical ability.

Fact: In a perfect world this might be the case, but then it would be true of everyone in a perfect world. Each of us has different strengths and weaknesses and gifted students no different. Some students are gifted mathematically and do not enjoy reading, some are great with historical information, but not with math, or they may be gifted academically and have no artistic talent. A student may be gifted in one area and need assistance and support in another.

Myth: Everyone is gifted.

Fact: If we are simply talking about the fact that we all have gifts and talents then this would be true, however, giftedness is more than that. The academic identification of giftedness is referring to a student with advanced capacity beyond his/her age appropriate peers. Those advancements set them apart as needing different curriculum than their age appropriate peers to meet their unique learning needs.

Myth: Gifted students don't need help, they can make it on their own.

Fact: Everyone needs someone to help them learn and grow. Well-trained teachers can guide students, challenge them, and support them so that they develop their full potential. Students who are not challenged can stagnate, become bored or frustrated, stop progressing, develop unhealthy habits, or even drop out of school. Just because a student may be ahead of their peers does not mean that they cannot benefit from help and encouragement to continue to grow and mature.

Myth: Gifted students come from middle and upper-class families.

Fact: Gifted students come from all walks of life. They are from all ethnic groups, all income levels, and all kinds of family dynamics.

Myth: Gifted students need to be with children of their own age.

Fact: This is true to a point. Children all go through the same developmental stages; however, gifted students do not develop their abilities at the same rate as their chronological peers. It is for this reason that many experts recommend that gifted students need time with both their age appropriate and ability appropriate peers.

Myth: It is easy for teachers to recognize the gifted students they have in class.

Fact: Statistical research tells us that without training teachers have

only a 50% chance of correctly identifying gifted students.

Myth: Teachers challenge all students so gifted students can get everything they need in the regular classroom setting.

Fact: This statement may be true of what teachers intend to do, however, in most classrooms it is far from reality. Most teachers are not trained to understand to needs of gifted students and therefore do not know how to best serve them in the classroom. Research conducted by the National Research Center on Gifted and Talented (NRC/GT) and the Fordham Institute support this fact. Approximately 60% of classrooms teachers have not been trained to teach advanced students. This also supports the fact that teachers are not always able to identify gifted students without training.

Myth: Gifted students need to stay in the regular classroom because they are a role model for and/or challenge the other students.

Fact: Realistically average and below-average students are more likely to model their behavior after students with similar capabilities and who are coping well in school. They are more motivated by students that they see as being like them and being successful than someone for whom they believe things come easy because they are so smart. Watching someone who is expected to succeed does little to increase a struggling student's sense of self-confidence. It is also important to remember that gifted students need to be with other gifted students for at least part of their academic experience to give them someone to interact with and a role-model to relate to.

Myth: If gifted students are grouped together, they become snobbish and stuck-up.

Fact: Some do and some do not. Any group of students can develop traits that are appealing and traits that are not desirable. This myth should never be used as support for not providing

opportunities for gifted students to work with like peers. This type of reasoning deprives gifted students of opportunities they need to reach their full potential.

Myth: Accelerating students can be social harmful to their development.

Fact: When the decision to accelerate is made with the students' best interest in mind this is a myth. Gifted students can feel bored in an academic setting designed for their chronological age peers. They may naturally be drawn to older students who are more closely matched to them intellectually. Acceleration can provide the best of both worlds in which students can be placed with their intellectual peers for their academic work and for social and physical activities the student can be matched with the peer group (chronological or intellectual) that is best suited to the students' needs and the activity.

Myth: Gifted students have pushy parents.

Fact: Like all other populations of students this is both true and false. Some gifted students far outdistance their parents academically and have to become their own advocates while others have parents that are very vocal and persistent in making sure their students have all the learning opportunities they need. There are also those parents who never speak up for fear of calling attention to their child. Just as students are unique so are parents.

Myth: Gifted education programs are for the elite.

Fact: Any program that is established with integrity and follows research and best practices is not elitist. These programs simply strive to meet the needs of the gifted students regardless of ethnicity and socioeconomic status. The State of Arkansas requires a multi criteria identification system to help ensure that students are identified based on the criteria of the program. Most schools conduct blind staffing meetings in which students are

assigned identification numbers and the identity of the students are not know to the committee.

Myth: Gifted students are all nerds.

Fact: Tell that to the quarterback of the football team, the beauty queen, the marching band drum major, the cheerleader, the JROTC cadet, or any other honor student who is a well-rounded teenager, and is also a gifted student. The stereotype of “nerd” is one that may fit some gifted students; however, it is not the norm. Gifted students fall into all categories with such diversity that it is impossible to lump them into any one or even a few major categories.

Myth: Gifted students don't know that they are “different” unless someone tells them.

Fact: Most gifted students do not need to be identified or labeled before they know that they are not like most of their chronological peers. They can see that they don't do things like the other students around them. They may not always have the proper terminology to explain the differences or what they need, but they definitely know there is a difference.

Myth: You can tell a gifted student because they are happy and popular.

Fact: This statement is not true about the populations in general and it is not factual for all gifted students either. Some gifted students are very popular, well-adjusted students with lots of friends and enjoying their social life. Other gifted students may be emotionally intense, sensitive, a perfectionist, deeply concerned with societal problems, isolated, underachieving, and the list goes on. It is estimated that 20 to 25% of gifted students have social and emotional difficulties. This is about twice as many as in the general population of students.

Myth: Gifted students all love school.

Fact: Most schools are geared for average learners. This can make it hard for gifted students to get excited about school. A gifted student that is not motivated by something in their academic career can become stagnate and possibly even drop out of school.

Myth: Gifted students always get good grades.

Fact: While there are some gifted students who always get good grades, it is not a trait of giftedness. It is important to remember that not all gifted students are equally gifted in all areas, some may struggle in one or more areas of their life, and some choose not to perform. Underachievement is a term that describes these gifted students. It is used when there is a difference in a student's academic performance and his/her actual ability. Underachieving can happen for many reasons; the student is frustrated, not being unchallenged, loses interest, has poor study skills, is underachieving to fit in with other peers, or they no longer trust the educational system. No matter what, most students do not turn this type of behavior around without the help of caring and perceptive adults to help to break the cycle.

Myth: Educators love working with gifted students.

Fact: Some do and some do not. Some teachers thrive while teaching gifted students, some are not comfortable teaching these students, and some feel ill-equipped to challenge them.

Myth: Gifted students must constantly be challenged and kept busy or they will become lazy.

Fact: Just like everyone else they need some down time. It never hurts to allow them to be with their chronological peers. They may become bored, but that will not make them lazy.

Myth: Gifted students tend to be weak and sickly; after all they spend all of their time studying.

Fact: Actually, gifted students tend to be physically stronger than their chronological peers. They have fewer illnesses and are generally taller and heavier. Many are athletes, involved in band, choir, theatre, and many other enriching activities.

Myth: Our district has a gifted and talented program, we have AP classes and that is enough.

Fact: Pre-AP and AP classes do not constitute a gifted program. They offer rigorous, advanced coursework and are under the umbrella of gifted programs; however, they cannot be the sole program. AP is limited in serving gifted and talented students in two major areas: First, AP is subject specific and does not address all of the needs of a gifted and talented student. Second, it is limited in scope and does not reach the gifted students in all grades. Districts must offer additional curriculum options to be considered as having gifted and talented services.

Myth: Gifted students have trouble adjusting to school and forming friendships.

Fact: Do all students have trouble adjusting to school and making friends? Gifted students are part of the whole population and like this larger population they will have students that fall into many categories. Like the larger population there will be some who have issues with school, peers, social issues, emotional needs, health issues and any other stigma thinkable. There will also be students who are well adjusted, love school, make friends easily and so on. Be careful to jump to conclusions and associate a trait exhibited by one student that you know to all other students who might be associated with characteristics that student has.

Myth: Gifted students share common psychological traits or personalities.

Fact: Some are outgoing risk-takers, challengers of the status quo. Some are quiet, satisfied with their private world. Some may be

troubled by an issue that can be, but may not be related to their gifts and talents. Some need constant feedback and guidance while others are self-motivated and are capable of working independently. Some need a lot of structure while others want the freedom of choices.

Myth: Gifted students are “Little Einsteins.”

Fact: The term “gifted” is widely misunderstood. “Little Einsteins” do exist, they are child prodigies. Examples of these students are those who enter first grade already able to solve square roots, or is a musical genius who is composing in their early teens. These students, however, are far and few between. Such a student would be in the top 1% of the total population. The term gifted as it is used in education refers to the top 5 to 10% of the population. While “Little Einsteins” are gifted, not all gifted students are Einsteins.

Myth: Students are either gifted or special needs, but they can't be both.

Fact: There are many students in the population who are gifted and may have a disability that qualifies them for special needs services. These students are known as “Twice Exceptional.” Twice Exceptional students often go undetected in regular classrooms because their special needs and gifts mask each other, making them appear “average.” Once a student is identified for services for their special needs they are often not considered for gifted services. Many educators cannot conceive of a student having abilities that will place them at both ends of the spectrum. It is important to avoid the stereotypes and keep the needs of the student at the center of all decision that are made for their educational well-being.

Myth: Gifted education requires no different funding than any other regular classroom.

Fact: This is not true. Funding is an important part of a successful program, so much so that the State of Arkansas provides extra funding for the identified gifted populations in all of its school districts. Gifted programs are diverse, so it can be difficult to calculate the costs for starting and maintaining a gifted education program. Gifted seminar and pull-out classrooms rarely use textbooks; instead they need resources and supplies. The scope and complexity of planning funding can be overwhelming. It is important to keep in mind that funding must be set aside for training, travel for enrichment trips, dues and fees for the competitions and entrance fees, and the resources and supplies to make appropriate curriculum and instruction happen.

Myth: Gifted students are good at everything they do.

Fact: Some students may seem to be good at everything they do, but if you look long enough and hard enough you will find something that they are only average at or even weak in. Remember that not all students are gifted in all areas of their life or to the same degree in all things.

Myth: Gifted students are all alike.

Fact: If you read through the list of characteristics that gifted students can possess you will soon see that not every gifted person can be identified by each and every characteristic on the list. There is no mold that all gifted students come from. Talents and strengths can vary widely with gifted students just like they would with any other population of students. Many researchers have studied gifted students, however, for this myth Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligences will make the case. Gardner's teachings show that each person may be gifted in different ways. Some have a linguistic intelligence, some musical intelligence; others may have a logical-mathematical intelligence. Gardner has identified 8 intelligences and is considering a 9th, does this sound like all gifted students are alike?

Myth: Textbooks and schoolwork are designed for exceptionally bright students.

Fact: Textbooks and regular curriculum are designed to teach the average-ability student. Most use a step-by-step (concrete sequential) approach and frequent repetition, which most gifted students, do not need in order to master the material. The exception to regular curriculum is advanced curriculum such as that offered by Advanced Placement courses. This advanced (college) curriculum offered to high school students, if done correctly, is designed for exceptionally bright and prepared students.

Myth: You can spot gifted students easily; they wear glasses and always have their noses in a book.

Fact: It is surprising how many people believe this. The attitude that being intelligent is synonymous with being a “nerd” is immensely destructive to children who cannot help being bright. Research repeatedly documents that gifted students learn very early to hide their ability and under-achieve to avoid ridicule or to just fit in. Research also indicates that gifted girls’ achievement often drops during their teen-age years, especially their performance and development in the areas of math and science.

Myth: I don’t have a child who needs gifted education so I don’t need to be concerned.

Fact: This is a narrow minded philosophy that is often held by many in the mainstream population. The fact is that many believe that in schools with good gifted programs, the quality of education on the whole is generally higher. National education presenter, Nancy Johnson, is fond of saying that establishing supporting gifted education improves our schools. It also provides quality education for the next generation of doctors, lawyers and professionals that are the future of our communities.