

Connecting **for high potential**

Your Tear and Share Guide

NAGC receives similar questions from teachers and parents; however, rarely is there an opportunity to explore how the “other side” might face the issue. Interestingly, both groups benefit from the same information even though they look at it from different perspectives and have different roles to play in helping gifted children reach their potential. Our ongoing goal is for teachers and parents to develop a broader understanding of their students’ potential and thus create stimulating learning environments.

This month’s topic: “But she (or he) doesn’t seem gifted to me...”

Signs of giftedness can be unrecognized or misunderstood

A TEACHER VIEW

Some days, being a seventh-grade science teacher can be disheartening; however, sometimes you meet a student who makes all of your efforts seem worthwhile. Maria’s infectious curiosity and probing questions during labs and lectures indicate her advanced understanding of the course content. I have been encouraging her to think about a future career in the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math) fields, but even though I’ve called home a couple of times and talked with Maria after school, I don’t sense that it’s important to her family.

I want to help Maria and her mother think ahead by selecting challenging classes and even planning for college but when I bring up the subject, I receive a skeptical look and the reminder that Maria has three younger brothers and more important things to do than homework. She has such potential!

A PARENT VIEW

My 8-year-old son, Eli, can’t wait to come home from school and work on his books. Interestingly he’s been “writing” and making little books since before he could really read or spell. We have stacks and stacks of his work. He has always loved to tell stories, so he looked forward to going to school because he knew he would be taught “all of the secrets” of reading and writing.

But there have been problems at school. In the first 2 years, Eli was quiet, well-behaved, and got decent grades, but things have been going downhill. He still doesn’t read easily and his spelling is terrible. The teacher says I shouldn’t worry since he’s making sufficient progress but I think something is wrong. How can such a bright, creative child not do well in school? I thought he was gifted when he was a young child. The teacher says he’s not.

“Gifted” at home, but not at school – or vice versa. Confusing, isn’t it? And certainly fodder for uneasy, potentially inflammatory communication. Who is right: parent or teacher? If you aren’t familiar with the parable of the blind men and the elephant, it is a pointed illustration of the “manysidedness” of real things and situations. This age-old story also highlights how easy it is to hold fast to what we observe, forgetting how another person could see the very same thing through a different lens and come to what might be a contradictory conclusion.

Like the blind men, parents and teachers develop a clearer picture of “the entire elephant” when they openly and willingly exchange information. What are some ways you can contribute to the process?

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For more resources online, visit www.nagc.org.

1. Raise Awareness, Not Alarm

- * A prevalent myth in education is that gifted learners will be “just fine” without any special challenge at home or in school. Understanding the cognitive and affective needs of gifted children requires confronting this notion with accurate information and persistence. To see other common myths, visit www.nagc.org/CMS400Min/index.aspx?id=531.
- * The best way to convey your vision of a gifted student’s needs is to openly share detailed observations. Avoid the temptation to simply rely on your memory, keep a notebook at your desk to jot down specific questions, events, or observations that will assist parents in understanding the trends you see at school—and to help you prepare for future meetings or conversations.
- * What is “giftedness?” To appreciate the fluidness of the term and the many ways it is used in both social and educational situations, look through background information at: www.nagc.org/index.aspx?id=574
- * Some behaviors and characteristics can be easily misinterpreted: Can gifted behaviors be mistaken for ADHD? Can a child be both gifted and ADHD? Can students with learning disabilities also be gifted? Refer to tools such as “Before Referring a Gifted Child for ADD, ADHD Evaluation- a checklist,” available online at: www.gt-cybersource.org/Record.aspx?NavID=2_0&rid=11510 or *Misdiagnosis and Dual Diagnoses of Gifted Children and Adults* (2005, Great Potential Press).

2. It’s All About Context

- * What could look like lack of involvement on the part of parents may, upon closer inspection, reveal barriers to parental support and participation. How can this be eased? Consider also a child’s activities outside the classroom walls. As gifted students enter the upper grades, attitude toward academic achievement may be influenced by family traditions, peer pressure, or other factors.
- * How sensitive are you to a family’s cultural or racial identity? For insight and tips, read “Involving Parents in the IEP Process” and “Underachievement Among Gifted Minority Students: Problems and Promises” available in the ERIC Archives at www.nagc.org.
- * Don’t forget, a child can behave differently depending on the situation. Don’t jump to the conclusion that because you see laser-beam attention directed toward an interest area at home, your child responds with the same attention in the classroom.
- * Take time to observe your child in the classroom, on the playground, and in social situations. Not to hover, but as a way to inform. Good teachers will welcome a mutually scheduled visit.
- * Volunteer to help on a regular basis. You’ll develop a richer picture of classroom dynamics and learn about both implicit and explicit classroom expectations. You can also help in other ways. See: <http://www.infotoday.com/MMSchools/sep00/johnson.htm>

3. Transitions Are Tricky...

- * Moving from one school setting to the next can be precarious for gifted students because information about prior acceleration or advanced learning opportunities can be easily lost in the shuffle. Be proactive! Parents might be hesitant to advocate for their transitioning child, so offer to contact a department head or teacher at the new school to share information. Help the child and parent assemble a portfolio of work for the new teachers.
- * Talk about college before high school. Parents need to know that gifted students in particular benefit from time to explore higher education choices, possible career options, and careful financial planning. Read *College Planning for Gifted Students* (2006, S. Berger).
- * For the Child: A child who is successfully navigating his environment may react in unexpected ways when put into a new situation. Think of a young reader who suddenly becomes aware that his peers in the classroom can’t read, so abruptly reverts to sounding out words like the others. The teacher may not know he’s masking a well-developed skill.
- * For the Parent: Think ahead and be as prepared as possible for change. Your first meeting with school personnel at each level can be critical. It’s difficult to walk the fine line between “appropriately proactive” and “perceived as overbearing.” Carefully prepare a packet to inform and help, but not drown a teacher in a blizzard of paper.

Beyond the obvious, there is always something else, something we didn’t imagine.