

Myths about Gifted Students

“Gifted students will do fine on their own.”

“Gifted programs are elitist.”

These and other myths prevent our country from appropriately educating millions of advanced students.

NAGC compiled a list of the most prevalent myths in gifted education with evidence rebutting each of them. This list was developed from a longer list of myths explored in a special of *Gifted Child Quarterly (GCQ)* in the Fall of 2009. NAGC Members can read the full issue of GCQ via the SAGE website

How many of these myths have hindered you, your child, and/or your school in the pursuit of a challenging education for advanced students?

1.	Myth:	Gifted Students Don't Need Help; They'll Do Fine On Their Own
	Truth:	Would you send a star athlete to train for the Olympics without a coach? Gifted students need guidance from well-trained teachers who challenge and support them in order to fully develop their abilities. Many gifted students may be so far ahead of their same-age peers that they know more than half of the grade-level curriculum before the school year begins. Their resulting boredom and frustration can lead to low achievement, despondency, or unhealthy work habits. The role of the teacher is crucial for spotting and nurturing talents in school.
2.	Myth:	Teachers Challenge All The Students, So Gifted Kids Will Be Fine In The Regular Classroom
	Truth:	Although teachers try to challenge all students they are frequently unfamiliar with the needs of gifted children and do not know how to best serve them in the classroom. A national study conducted by the Fordham Institute found that 58% of teachers have received no professional development focused on teaching academically advanced students in the past few years and 73% of teachers agreed that “Too often, the brightest students are bored and under-challenged in school – we’re not giving them a sufficient chance to thrive. This report confirms what many families have known: not all teachers are able to recognize and support gifted learners.” ¹
3.	Myth:	Gifted Students Make Everyone Else In The Class Smarter By Providing A Role Model Or A Challenge
	Truth:	Average or below-average students do not look to the gifted students in the class as role models. Watching or relying on someone who is expected to succeed does little to increase a struggling student’s sense of self-

confidence.² Similarly, gifted students benefit from classroom interactions with peers at similar performance levels and become bored, frustrated, and unmotivated when placed in classrooms with low or average-ability students.

4. Myth: All Children Are Gifted

Truth: All children have strengths and positive attributes, but not all children are gifted in the educational sense of the word. The label “gifted” in a school setting means that when compared to others his or her age or grade, a child has an advanced capacity to learn and apply what is learned in one or more subject areas, or in the performing or fine arts. This advanced capacity requires modifications to the regular curriculum to ensure these children are challenged and learn new material. Gifted does not connote good or better; it is a term that allows students to be identified for services that meet their unique learning needs.

5. Myth: Acceleration Placement Options Are Socially Harmful For Gifted Students

Truth: Academically gifted students often feel bored or out of place with their age peers and naturally gravitate towards older students who are more similar as “intellectual peers.” Studies have shown that many students are happier with older students who share their interest than they are with children the same age.³ Therefore, acceleration placement options such as early entrance to Kindergarten, grade skipping, or early exit should be considered for these students.

6. Myth: Gifted Education Programs Are Elitist

Truth: Gifted education programs are meant to help all high-ability students. Gifted learners are found in all cultures, ethnic backgrounds, and socioeconomic groups. However, many of these students are denied the opportunity to maximize their potential because of the way in which programs and services are funded, and/or flawed identification practices. For example, reliance on a single test score for gifted education services may exclude selection of students with different cultural experiences and opportunities. Additionally, with no federal money and few states providing an adequate funding stream, most gifted education programs and services are dependent solely on local funds and parent demand. This means that in spite of the need, often only higher-income school districts are able to provide services, giving the appearance of elitism.

7. Myth: That Student Can't Be Gifted, He Is Receiving Poor Grades

Truth: Underachievement describes a discrepancy between a student’s performance and his actual ability. The roots of this problem differ, based on each child’s experiences. Gifted students may become bored or frustrated in an unchallenging classroom situation causing them to lose interest, learn bad study habits, or distrust the school

environment. Other students may mask their abilities to try to fit in socially with their same-age peers and still others may have a learning disability that masks their giftedness. No matter the cause, it is imperative that a caring and perceptive adult help gifted learners break the cycle of underachievement in order to achieve their full potential.

8. Myth: Gifted Students Are Happy, Popular, And Well Adjusted In School

Truth: Many gifted students flourish in their community and school environment. However, some gifted children differ in terms of their emotional and moral intensity, sensitivity to expectations and feelings, perfectionism, and deep concerns about societal problems. Others do not share interests with their classmates, resulting in isolation or being labeled unfavorably as a “nerd.” Because of these difficulties, the school experience is one to be endured rather than celebrated.

9. Myth: This Child Can't Be Gifted, He Has A Disability

Truth: Some gifted students also have learning or other disabilities. These “twice-exceptional” students often go undetected in regular classrooms because their disability and gifts mask each other, making them appear “average.” Other twice-exceptional students are identified as having a learning disability and as a result, are not considered for gifted services. In both cases, it is important to focus on the students’ abilities and allow them to have challenging curricula in addition to receiving help for their learning disability.⁴

10. Myth: Our District Has A Gifted And Talented Program: We Have AP Courses

Truth: While AP classes offer rigorous, advanced coursework, they are not a gifted education program. The AP program is designed as college-level classes taught by high school teachers for students willing to work hard. The program is limited in its service to gifted and talented students in two major areas: First AP is limited by the subjects offered, which in most districts is only a small handful. Second it is limited in that, typically, it is offered only in high school and is generally available only for 11th and 12th grade students. The College Board acknowledges that AP courses are for any student who is academically prepared and motivated to take a college-level course.

11. Myth: Gifted Education Requires An Abundance Of Resources

Truth: Offering gifted education services does not need to break the bank. A fully developed gifted education program can look overwhelming in its scope and complexity. However, beginning a program requires little more than an acknowledgement by district and community personnel that gifted students need something different, a commitment to provide appropriate curriculum and instruction, and teacher training in identification and gifted education strategies.

View this video on Myths in Gifted Education produced by teens in the Baltimore County (MD) Public Schools for the Maryland State Department of Education

Read an overview of the Myths by Don Treffinger that appeared in the fall issue of Teaching for High Potential.

Read about Jacob K. Javits Grant to Purdue University to extend research showing when gifted students are clustered together, all children perform better.

¹Farkas, S. & Duffet, A. (2008). Results from a national teacher survey. In Thomas B. Fordham Institute, Highachievement students in the era of NCLB (p. 78). Washington, DC: Author. <http://www.edexcellence.net/publications/high-achieving-students-in.html>

²Fiedler, E.D., Lange, R. E., Winebrenner, S. (1993). *In search of reality: Unraveling the myths about tracking, ability grouping, and the gifted.* *Roper Review*, (16), 4-7.

³Colangelo, N., Assouline, S. G., & Gross, M.U.M. (2004). *A nation deceived: How schools hold back America's brightest students.* Iowa City: University of Iowa.

⁴Olenchak, F. R., & Reis, S. M. (2002) *Gifted students with learning disabilities.* In M. Neihart, S. M. Reis, N. Robinson, and S. Moon (Eds.), *The Social and Emotional Development of Gifted Children* (pp. 177-192). Waco TX: Prufrock Press.

