

Frequently Asked Questions

Questions:

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Answers:

#1 What Utah State rules and regulations require districts to provide for the needs of gifted and talented students?

Utah State requirements for gifted and talented students are outlined in the Utah Administrative Code, R277-711-3. The program standards follow:

"A. Approximately qualified people shall direct and implement the district's program(s) for gifted and talented students."

"B. Each district shall have a process for identifying students..."

"C. Each school district shall have a process for appropriately placing students identified..."

"D. School districts shall develop and submit...annually a plan for educating gifted and talented students. This plan shall contain provisions to:

(1-11) develop philosophy; select coordinator; provide integrated and articulated curricula; identify and use appropriate teaching strategies; adopt flexible pacing; offer program options beyond the normal institutional boundaries; provide guidance to students in addressing personal and interpersonal needs; balance acceleration with enrichment; provide staff development; evaluate to assure accountability."

#2 Aren't all children gifted?

Since there are many concepts of what it is to be gifted, the term gifted needs to be defined. There are many definitions of giftedness; however, they all have some commonalities: A gifted person is someone who shows, or has the potential for showing, an exceptional level of performance in one or more areas of expression. Seeley (1994) wrote, "Professionals today view giftedness and intelligence as multidimensional and manifested primarily as advanced development at early ages."

#3 What percent of students are gifted and talented?

Many state definitions of gifted and talented (including Utah) are based on the 1981 Marland Report definition, which estimated that gifted students make up a minimum of 3 to 5 percent of the student population. The National Excellence Report (1994) suggests that we adopt a definition that is more reflective of today's knowledge and thinking. Research has challenged the view of intelligence as fixed and measurable by one test. Tannenbaum (1997) proposed, "One set of criteria may be ineffective because it excludes too many children who may grow to be gifted; other qualifying characteristics may prove inefficient by including too many who turn out to be non-gifted. There is a tradeoff between effectiveness and efficiency and educators invariably opt for a definition that enables them to cast the widest possible net at the outset to be sure not to neglect children whose high potential may be all but hidden from view."

The National Excellence Report (1994) recommends the following definition which is based on the federal Javits Gifted and Talented Education Act: "Children and youth with outstanding talent perform or show the potential for performing at remarkably high levels of accomplishment when compared with others of their age, experience or environment. These children and youth exhibit high performance capability in intellectual, creative, and/or artistic areas, possess an unusual leadership capacity, or excel in specific academic fields. They require services or activities not ordinarily provided by the schools. Outstanding talents are present in children and youth from all cultural groups, across all economic strata, and in all area of human endeavor."

#4 Can gifted and talented students succeed in school without gifted programming?

Research indicates that gifted students need special programs, differentiated curriculum and instruction, and highly trained teachers to succeed in school. Without such programming gifted and talented children may have social and emotional difficulties. It is estimated that about 20 to 25 percent of gifted children have social and emotional difficulties at a rate about twice as high as one finds in populations of school children at large (Janos and Robinson, 1985). Winner (1996) points out that children with exceptional high ability in any area face certain kinds of social and emotional problems just by the virtue of being out of step with their peers. She further suggests that these social and emotional difficulties are aggravated because their high ability is out of balance with their social and emotional development and age-appropriate size.

Rimm (1987) documented that the social and emotional difficulties are the result of constant interaction with a non-challenging curriculum. Lovecky (1994) reports that the extreme asynchrony of the highly gifted child presents numerous and severe problems that call for extremely differentiated curriculum and exceptionally well-trained teachers. Rimm (1987) indicates that when students are constantly interacting with a non-challenging curriculum, their self-esteem is actually at risk. She states, "the surest path to high self-esteem is to be successful at something one perceived would be difficult."

National Excellence Report (1993) states, "American students perform poorly on international tests, are offered a less rigorous curriculum, read fewer demanding books, do less homework and enter the work force or post-secondary education less well prepared. Gifted and talented elementary students have mastered from 35 to 50 percent of the curriculum to be offered in five basic subjects before they begin the school year. Most regular classroom teachers make few, if any, provisions for talented students. Most of the highest-achieving students reported that they studied less than an hour a day."

The National Excellence Report further states, "High ability students receive mixed messages. Our society urges these young people to do well in school; but it also encourages them not to flaunt their intelligence and, in some cases, to avoid high grades and excellent academic achievement altogether. Students say they want to do well, but not exceptionally well because it is more important to be accepted by the "in" crowd [which] is not the "brain" crowd." Some recommendations were to, "set challenging curriculum standards, provide more challenging opportunities to learn, increase access to early childhood education, increase learning opportunities for disadvantaged and minority children with outstanding talents, broaden the definition of gifted, and emphasize teacher development and match world performance."

#5 What is the best way to serve gifted and talented students?

Feldhusen (1998) states, "Gifted children thrive and learn best in special classes where they are together on a daily basis for all or most of the school day. Special classes are also more cost-effective. [They] simply involve regrouping gifted children into a class of typical size for the school and having one teacher serve them just as one teacher would serve a mixed group of the same number of students." VanTassel-Baska, Willis, and Meyers (1989) studied full-time, self-contained classes for gifted students and found very positive effects. Feldhusen and Slayer (1990) found very positive results for student motivation, attitudes, and achievement in a statewide study of special classes for gifted.

#6 What does the research indicate about grouping gifted and talented students together?

One of the most effective means for meeting the needs of gifted and talented students, possibly the most promising (Feldhusen, 1991a, 1991b) is grouping students for instruction on the basis of competence. Scholarly reports and meta-analyses of the grouping literature indicate strong support of the practice of homogeneous grouping for meeting the needs of gifted and talented students (Allan, 1991; Feldhusen, 1989, 1991c; Feldhusen and Moon, 1992; Gamoran, 1986; Gamoran & Berends, 1987; Kulik & Kulik, 1982, 1987, 1992; Page & Keith, 1996; Rogers, 1991). Both general intellectual grouping programs (such as School Within a School, Gifted Magnet Schools, Full-time Gifted Programs or Gifted classrooms) and

full-time grouping for special academic ability (such as Magnet Schools) have produced marked academic achievement gains as well as moderate increases in attitude toward the subjects in which these students are grouped (Rogers, 1991).

#7 Can the needs of gifted and talented students be met in the regular classroom?

Research demonstrates that the academic needs of gifted children are not met in the regular classroom. A report from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (1993) found that regular school curriculum does not challenge gifted and talented students. Most academically talented students have already mastered up to one half of the required curriculum offered to them in elementary school. Classroom teachers do little to accommodate the different learning needs of gifted children. In an observational study, Westberg, Archambault, Dobyms, Salvin (1993) found little or no differentiation in instructional and curricular practices in the regular classroom. One study found that the students observed received no instructional or curricular differentiation in 84% of the instructional activities in which they participated (Westberg, et al. 1993). Research indicates that regular classroom teachers are not attempting to adjust curriculum or instruction to meet the academic needs of the gifted student.

In the report, titled Prisoners of Time (National Education Commission on Time and Learning [NECTL], 1994), the commission made the following conclusions and recommendations.

"If experience, research and common sense teach nothing else, they confirm the truism that people learn at different rates, and in different ways with different subjects." (p. 7)

"Research confirms common sense, some students take three to six times longer than others to learn the same thing." (p. 15)

"Under today's practices, high-ability student are forced to spend more time than they need on curriculum developed for students of moderate ability. Many become bored, unmotivated, and frustrated. They become prisoners of time." (p. 15)

"Students deserve an education that matches their needs every hour of the school day, not just an hour or two a week. Pull-out programs are a poor part-time solution to a serious full-time problem." (p. 15)

"Fix the Design Flaw: Use Time in New and Better Ways. We recommend that the state and local boards works with schools to redesign education so that time becomes a factor supporting learning not a boundary marking its limits." (p. 31).

Delcourt, Loyd, Cornell, Goldberg (1994) found that gifted children in pull-out, separate class, and special school programs showed higher achievement than gifted students who were not in programs, and in most cases, than those from within-class programs. The results of their study indicate that the longer gifted students are placed together in specialized classes, the greater their gains academically.

#8 If schools ability group for gifted and talented students, will there be a negative effect on the other students?

On the contrary, Kulik (1992) found youngsters of all achievement groups benefitted from ability grouping when the curriculum was appropriately adjusted to the aptitude levels of the groups and cautioned that if schools eliminated grouping programs with differentiated curricula, the damage to student achievement would be great. He indicated that higher and

lower aptitude students would suffer academically from elimination of grouping. Conversely, he cautioned that schools should resist the call for the elimination of the use of ability grouping. Bright, average and slow students profit from grouping programs. Cross-grade and within class programs are examples of programs that provide both grouping and curricular adjustment. Children from such grouping programs outperform control children from mixed classes by two to three months on grade-equivalent scales (Kulik, 1992).

#9 Shouldn't gifted and talented students remain in the regular classroom as role models for other students?

Gifted and talented students are found not to be the best role models for other students because they often demonstrate quick mastery of content and can discourage those who struggle for mastery. Felhusen (1989) states, "watching someone of similar ability succeed at a task raises the observer's feeling of efficacy and motivates them to try the task, hence the superiority of 'coping' role models over 'mastery' role models. Coping models gradually improve their performance after some effort and are thus effective models for peers who will also have to struggle to achieve academically. Master models (often the gifted), on the other hand, demonstrate perfect performance from the outset."

In a comprehensive review of the literature of peer role models in the classroom, Shunk (1987) concludes that the more alike the role models are, the greater the probability that the model affects observer behavior. In other words, watching someone of similar abilities succeed at a task, raises the observers expectation they too can succeed and motivates them to try the task. Struggling students do not choose high-ability students to be their role models.

"Removing gifted students from regular classrooms does not deprive other students of role models, instead, it allows other to be leaders and top performers" (Feldhusen, 1989).

#10 Is cooperative learning in heterogeneous groups appropriate for gifted and talented students?

Mixed ability cooperative learning should be used sparingly for students who are gifted and talented (Rogers, 1991). When high, medium, and low achieving students are grouped together there is a lack of attention to curricular and pacing needs of academically talented students. If cooperative learning is used, student achievement disparities within the group should not be too severe. Cooperative learning in the heterogeneous classroom should not be substituted for specialized programs and services for academically talented students (Robinson, 1991).

#11 Do separate programs for gifted children lead to feelings of superiority and elitism?

Students from separate class programs scored at the highest levels of achievement and the lowest levels of perception of academic competence when compared to gifted students in the regular classroom (Delcourt et al., 1994). Possibly, challenging curriculum and competition among academic peers may lead to lower perception of self. Silverman (1983) points out that "elitism has been misdirected at the gifted...There is no evidence that grouping gifted children fosters snobbery" (Newland, 1976). Silverman argues that a false sense of one's importance is more likely to result from being at the top in one's class all the way through school with little need to study. Grouping gifted children together usually diminishes feelings of superiority. The

research shows that inclusion (or heterogeneous grouping) lowers the academic self-concepts of low-ability students (Wilson, 1992), whereas homogeneous grouping lowers the academic self-concept of high-ability students (Gibbons et al., 1994).

Schools become elite when programming is not provided for gifted students. Disadvantaged students are at the whim of the schools because they have little access to other opportunities outside of school. "Severe among economically disadvantaged and minority students, who have access to fewer advanced educational opportunities and whose talents often go unnoticed" (Ross, 1993).

#12 How do we insure that gifted children will learn to get along with everyone?

The social growth of the gifted is paradoxical. The research shows that gifted children have excellent social skills and relate well to age peers (Janos & Robinson, 1985; Robinson & Noble, 1991). However, clinical reports reveal that many of these well-adjusted students suffer loneliness and inner conflicts between a desire to fit in and their ideals (Silverman, 1993). Silverman explains that advanced students tend to be socially mature, empathetic and solve problems. These traits are valued by their age peers and often they are selected as leaders. Silverman states "The aim of social development of the gifted should not be fitting in with age peers; this is a short-sighted goal. The goals should be wholeness of the individual..."

Ever since gifted children were first studied it was found that they select friends who are their mental age rather than their chronological age (Gross, 1989; Hollingworth, 1931; Mann, 1957; O'Shea, 1960; Robinson & Noble, 1991; Terman, 1925). Roedell (1985) found that gifted children develop socially more easily when they interact with their mental peers.

#13 When should we begin to identify and serve gifted and talented students?

Silverman (1998) postulates that if developmentally advanced children are viewed as children with special needs – a branch of exceptional education – then the question, "When is it optimal time to identify any exceptional child?" must be raised. The answer, "As early as possible." Early intervention for development of talent (Bloom, 1985) and in the optimal emotional, social, moral, spiritual, and intellectual development of precocious children. Silverman, (1998) indicates that current research supports giftedness is identifiable and measurable by 18 months of age and probably much earlier in the highly gifted. Positive interventions for the gifted include parental support, early identification, grouping with mentors, and self-recognition in adulthood.

#14 Is acceleration appropriate for gifted and talented students?

Students who are gifted and talented should be given experiences involving a variety of appropriate acceleration-based options, several forms of acceleration produce substantial academic effects: Non-graded Classrooms, Curriculum Compression (Compacting), Grade Telescoping, Subject Acceleration, and Early Admission to College. Moderate academic gains were found for Advanced Placement (Rogers, 1991). Talented students from accelerated classes outperform non accelerates of the same age and IQ by almost one full year on the grade-equivalent scales of standardized achievement tests. Talented students from enriched classes outperform control talented students from conventional classes by four to five months on the grade-equivalent scales of standardized achievement tests. Talented students from

enriched classes outperform control talented students from conventional classes by four to five months on the grade-equivalent scales (Kulik, 1992).

#15 What are the best practices in gifted and talented education?

Coleman and Gallagher (1995) have outlined best practices for gifted and talented education based on theory, research, and experience. These guiding principles, although not meant to be comprehensive, provide a platform for appropriate differentiated service options for high ability learners.

Guides for Best Practices

1. "Children who are talented and gifted form a diverse group with varying needs and, therefore, require a range of service options."
2. "Children who are gifted learn at a faster rate than other children of their age, experience, and environment and, therefore, can often move through the curriculum at a more rapid pace which is developmentally appropriate for them."
3. "Children who are gifted share the ability to think with more complexity and abstraction than other children of their age, experience, and environment and, therefore, require differentiated curriculum".
4. "Children who are gifted have some unique social needs and may feel different from other children of their same age, experience and environment; therefore, they need access to appropriate counseling and support to assure their affective well-being."
5. "Because of their different learning and social needs, children who are gifted require time with others who are similar to them in order to establish cognitive relationships and to facilitate their academic and social growth."
6. "Some children who are gifted may not be reaching their potential, in fact, they may not even be recognized as gifted. This may be particularly true of students with limited opportunities to learn; therefore, additional support is needed for these students to offer opportunities for their giftedness to develop."
7. "Because the learning needs of children who are gifted are different from other children of their same age, experience, or environment, teachers responsible for these students must have an appropriate base of knowledge and skills to meet these needs, and should enjoy working with these students."
8. "When an appropriately differentiated education is not provided, children who are gifted do not thrive in school and may even suffer cognitive or affective harm."
9. "Services for children who are gifted must be part of an overall educational program supporting excellence for all students, and it must include opportunities for advanced students."
10. "The early educational experiences of potentially gifted students help to shape their learning habits; therefore, it is essential that young students with high abilities have access to appropriately stimulating and challenging education to help ensure that their potential is developed."
11. "When given appropriate education opportunities, children who are gifted will become increasingly knowledgeable; therefore, their need for differentiation increases as well, as compared to others of their age recognized and served."
12. "Potentially gifted students from culturally diverse or economically disadvantage families

and students with disabilities are often overlooked; therefore, special efforts may be needed to ensure students are recognized and served.”

#16 What are the essential elements of exemplary programs for gifted and talented students?

Themes in exemplary gifted and talented programs identified included: Leadership (strong administrative voice to represent and implement the program); Atmosphere and Environment (supportive, accepting, and positive throughout the school); Communication (clear and frequent between and among parents, teachers, students, and administrators); Curriculum and Instruction (teachers’ flexibility in matching to students’ needs); and Attention to Student Needs (commitment to serving students from traditionally under-represented populations). In addition, the exemplary programs were found to influence student achievement and motivation through exposure to challenge and choices (Delcourt et al., 1994).

#17 What percent of gifted and talented students are at risk?

Several factors put gifted and talented students at risk. Silverman (1993) describes gifted as being out of step with their aged peers. The rates of their cognitive, emotional and physical development are out of sync with their chronological aged peers. Therefore, they are thinking about concepts and goals beyond their age and feel they do not, cannot, or should not fit in with aged peers. Underachievement is also a concern. The gifted constitute America’s largest group of underachievers (Reis. 1998). Other at risk factors include behavioral problems, disabilities, gender, low income, cultural diversity peer and social relationships and school environment. It is estimated that about 20 to 25 percent of gifted children have social and emotional difficulties, a rate about twice as high as one finds in populations of school children at large (Janos and Robinson, 1985).

#18 Why isn’t gifted education good for everyone?

Many programs pioneered by gifted education are now being used in the regular classroom. This trend represents best teaching practices rather than being only appropriate for gifted education. Strategies such as increased pace of study, and differing approaches to content, process, and product are necessary for gifted students and may not be appropriate for their age mates (Tomlinson, 1996).

Carol Ann Tomlinson (1999) clarifies, “Students differ in experience, readiness, interest, intelligences, language, culture, gender and mode of learning. To maximize the potential in each learner, educators need to meet each child at his or her starting point and ensure substantial growth during each school term. Classrooms that ignore student differences are unlikely to maximize potential in any student who differs significantly from the “norm.”

Students with less-developed readiness may need

- * someone to help them identify and make up gaps in their learning so they can move ahead;
- * more opportunities for direct instruction or practice;
- * activities or products that are more structured or more concrete, with fewer steps, closer to their own experiences, and calling on simpler reading skills; or
- * a more deliberate pace of learning.

Advanced students, on the other hand, may need

- * to skip practice with previously mastered skills and understandings;

- * activities and products that are quite complex, open-ended, abstract, and multifaceted, drawing on advanced reading materials; or

- * a brisk pace of work, or perhaps a slower pace to allow for greater depth of exploration of a topic.”