

# Common Myths: Gifted Education



**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, challenging teachers to help develop their talents. 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 so crucial for spotting and nurturing talents in school.

**Myth:** Teachers challenge all the students, so gifted kids will be fine in the regular classroom.

**Truth:** Although it's true that teachers try to challenge all students and do the best they can, they are frequently unfamiliar with the needs of gifted children and do not know how to best serve them in the classroom. The National Research Center on Gifted and Talented (NRC/GT) found that **61% of classroom teachers** had no training in teaching highly able students, limiting the challenging educational opportunities offered to advanced learners. [1]

**Myth:** Gifted students make everyone else in the class smarter by providing a role model or a challenge.

**Truth:** Actually, average or below-average students do not look to the gifted students in the class as role models. They are more likely to model their behavior on those who have similar capabilities and are coping well in school. Seeing a student at a similar performance level succeed motivates students because it adds to their own sense of ability; 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 interactions with peers at similar performance levels.

**Myth:** All children are gifted.

**Truth:** While all children are special and deserving, not all children have exceptional academic gifts that require additional support in school. Interestingly, most people readily accept that there are children in performing arts or athletics whose talents are so far above those of others their age that they require additional or different training or coaching. It is important to understand that these same characteristics apply to academically gifted students who need support and guidance to reach their full potential.

**Myth:** Acceleration options, such as early entrance, grade skipping, or early exit can be 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]

**Myth:** Gifted education programs are elitist.

**Truth:** Gifted education is not about status, it is about meeting student needs. Advanced learners are found in all cultures, ethnic backgrounds, and socioeconomic groups. However, not every school district offers services for gifted students, even though there are gifted students in every district. In many states, only affluent districts can afford to offer gifted education programs and services in the absence of federal and state funding.

**Myth:** That student can't be gifted; he's 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 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. No matter the cause, it is imperative that a caring and perceptive adult help gifted learners break the cycle of underachievement in order for them to achieve their full potential. See ERIC digests on [underachievement](#) in gifted boys; [underachievement](#) of minority students.

**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. It is estimated that 20 to 25% of gifted children have social and emotional difficulties, about twice as many as in the general population of students. [4]

**Myth:** This child can't be gifted, he is in special education.

**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. [5]

[1] Archambault, F. S., Westberg, K. L., Brown, S. W., Hallmark, B. W., Emmons, C. L., & Zhang, W. (1993). *Regular classroom practices with gifted students: Results of a national survey of classroom teachers* (#93102). Storrs, CT: the National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented.

[2] Fiedler, 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.

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

[4] Winner, E. (1996). *Gifted children: myths and realities*. New York: Basic Books.

[5] Olenchak, 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.