

Introduction

This handbook was written by parents, for parents, to share experiences and information about gifted children who attend LPS. The handbook was authored by the Community Review Committee of the LPS Gifted Program—a group of parents of LPS students from around the district, including parents of elementary, middle, and high school children. The Committee was created by the School Board as part of the gifted policy adopted in 1994. Members volunteer to serve. The duties include:

- o Assisting with the Parent Forums
- o Encouraging and facilitating communication between parents and LPS regarding gifted education
- o Provide input to supervisor of the gifted program
- o Reviewing the LPS gifted program.

Parents of gifted children want what every parent wants: to educate their children commensurate with their abilities and to nurture their social and emotional growth. These goals should unite the parents of children of all learning abilities and styles.

Why do gifted students need a program?

Sometimes parents or even students themselves hear that “smart” children/young adults don’t need any special help or attention, that they can or should be able to take care of everything themselves. This may be true of some children, but often when gifted students find themselves in classrooms that do not address their unique learning styles and thinking patterns, the results can be boredom, frustration, anger, emotional confusion, and even depression. Ironically, these brightest students may tune out and achieve far below their potential, sometimes even dropping out of school.

Like all children and young adults, gifted students need to be challenged and nurtured, to learn both that they are unique individuals and they share common traits with others. While they may learn quickly and have amazing knowledge on topics that interest them, they cannot take care of themselves any more (or less) than other children. They need parenting, guiding, and teaching that fits them as individuals. Our children need to be challenged and nurtured, and America needs them to develop their abilities fully.

How do I know if my child is gifted?

Gifted is a simple term to describe a complex group of children, each with his or her own special talents, strengths, and weaknesses. Generally, *gifted* describes children with talents or abilities remarkable among children their age that require special challenges, teaching methods, or opportunities to develop fully. In general, they tend to be in the top 10% of the general population on an intelligence test.

All parents know that their own children are special, but often we hesitate before approaching education professionals to ask, “Is my child gifted?” Yet many gifted children are first identified by their parents.

Some Commonly Seen Characteristics of Gifted Learners

Some students are easily identified by using the following characteristics. Other students, who may have learning disabilities or other exceptionalities, may be more difficult to identify easily.

Intellectual Traits

- **Advanced vocabulary for their age:** Some children sound like little adults. They are fascinated by words and language. As they grow older, students may be voracious readers with extensive vocabularies.
- **Creative problem solving:** Often these children can generate numerous, innovative, or even unusual solutions, which they may apply to debates with their parents.
- **Passionate interests and ability to develop and retain vast storehouses of information about those interests:** Their topics may vary from dinosaurs to Star Trek to oceanography to art, but these children often become real experts on anything that interests them.
- **Intense focus:** These children may be able to focus on one thing much longer than would be typical for their age group. The flip side is that they may have a harder time changing their focus when it's time to do something different.
- **Learns/memorizes new material rapidly and gets bored by repetition:** Some children love to collect facts, words, and conversations. They seem to memorize these automatically, with little support or effort. But they may get turned off by having to answer the same questions they've already answered.
- **High energy level (sometimes combined with reduced need for sleep):** Some gifted children are “no

nap” babies and light and short sleepers. Their parents may be very jealous of mothers and fathers whose babies sleep like babies.

- **Keen observer and questioner:** These children often display an early interest in national or world events. This interest may result in overwhelming feelings about the result of these events. Sometimes parents need to turn off the news for periods of time if this becomes problematic.

Creativity

- Openness to new experiences, solutions, ideas
- unconventional solutions
- challenge authority
- spontaneity and expressiveness
- internal locus of evaluation
- ability to defer closure
- high theoretical and aesthetic values
- unfrightened by the unknown
- able to integrate
- self-accepting, and less afraid of others’ perceptions
- ability to concentrate
- ability to accept rather than avoid conflict
- curious
- sensitive
- enthusiastic and impulsive
- excited by novelty of idea/music/design
- overlook details

Social and emotional traits

Typically, high ability learners are characterized by a constellation of attributes that may contribute both to their emotional well being and to their difficulty in adapting to their social environment. These attributes may include any or all or none of the following¹:

- **Asynchronous development:** It often astonishes adults when the five year old who has read everything on dinosaurs throws a screaming tantrum because of a minor change in schedule, yet this sort of uneven development is quite typical for advanced learners. Motor skills may lag cognitive development, which can cause frustration.
- **Multipotentiality:** While it is difficult for some people to be sympathetic about viewing this trait as a problem, when students need to begin to make choices about courses and careers (“How can I choose between advanced English and choir?”) the problem of having advanced capabilities in multiple areas can hinder their growth in either area. Rather than close one door, students may divide themselves to the

¹ Adapted from Clark, 1992 and Webb, 1994.

point of exhaustion or may choose to participate in multiple areas—none of them as well as they might be capable of.

- **Peer Relations:** The question of who is a peer may appear early in the life of high ability learners, as they may select peers based on common interests and attitudes rather than on the basis of chronological age. As a result, students may appear at odds with the expectations of how—and with whom—they spend their free time. For some, more introverted students, an active social life may appear to be far less valued than an active literary life.
- **Perfectionism:** Some children may develop unrealistically high expectations of themselves, often due to their past performances. It is important to distinguish between the child who maintains high personal standards in multiple areas (as a result of wanting to do one's personal best whenever possible) and the child who feels external pressure to achieve. In the second case, the student may become paralyzed and eventually

become unwilling to turn in anything that is not “perfect.” This excessive self-criticism can become debilitating and may result in course failures and lowered self-esteem.

Misconceptions

Myths:

1. **All gifted children like school and do well there.** Not all high ability learners perform well in school. A number of obstacles may limit achievement, including boredom if the curriculum moves more slowly than the cognitive pace of the individual child; perfectionism that may prevent a student from turning in assignments when they do not meet up with the student's expectations; and relationships with other students in the class, who may be impatient with the talented learner's need to move deeper into the content.
2. **Smart students develop evenly.** High ability learners may develop asynchronously, and may feel frustrated at their inability to perform physically what they can conceive of cognitively.
3. **Early ripe, early rot.** Early in the twentieth century, a number of theorists believed that prodigies peaked early and burned out quickly, like meteorites. It is true that if students' needs and talents are neglected, these skills

may deteriorate, but when a child is phenomenal at a young age, he or she is likely to continue to be talented in this area throughout their life span. When students' talents are ignored, the result can range from anger to depression and mental illness.

4. **The teacher/school knows what's best for my child.**
The best expert on the individual child is the parent. Teachers also know and support the children they teach and have the ability to compare students to others of their same age, but many of the behaviors that define a child's strengths may not be visible in the classroom context. The best scenario occurs when the parent and school system work together to nurture the student. The parent will always, however, have the role of the student's educational advocate.

How children are identified for LPS gifted program

LPS has a long tradition and commitment toward excellence in educating gifted students. The LPS Gifted Program is outlined in [Policy 6300](#), revised from a previous policy and adopted by the Lincoln School Board in January 1994.

Children are formally identified as gifted and eligible for the services of the LPS Gifted Program by several means. They can be recommended for identification by

anyone—a parent, a teacher, community member, or themselves. The recommendation should be made to the gifted facilitator or principal of your child's school. You can also directly contact Dr. Joan Jacobs. The Gifted Consultant for Lincoln Public Schools (436-1822) if you have questions your gifted facilitator or principal cannot answer, but it is always advisable to start any inquiry at your own school building.

When a student is recommended for gifted identification, his or her building's facilitator helps the teachers with the Data Gathering Process. Students are then evaluated based on their grades and class performance, outstanding products, behavioral checklists, standardized achievement test scores, or IQ test scores. Depending upon the approved IQ test given, a score in the 130-132 range, or above, is one benchmark for admission to the Gifted Program. Additional services are offered for highly gifted students who score 145 or above. These tests can be administered by LPS psychologists, upon parents' requests or permission (if requested by a teacher or others). See Policy 6310.1 for more information.

It is the stated policy of the School Board to include children within the gifted program who are high achievers in the classroom and who need and would benefit by these services, not just students who score well on standardized tests. As a parent, you should consider recommending your child for the

program if, in your opinion, she or he meets many of the traits of gifted children.

Sometimes when children are evaluated for the program, their test scores or grades or work products do not immediately qualify them for services, but the student, his or her parents, or a teacher still feel the child belongs in the program. What can you do? There are several possibilities. You can request retesting by LPS; typically waiting at least a year is recommended between administrations of the same test, to ensure its validity.

You can also arrange for evaluation of your child by a psychologist in private practice, at your own expense. The Nebraska Association for the Gifted (NAG) can provide referrals to qualified psychologists. Calling UNL's Educational Psychology Department would be helpful. Also, LPS Student Services Department has a list of qualified psychologists.

Such a private evaluation should include an initial meeting between the psychologist and the parent to brief you on the test, followed by a testing session with your child, and concluding with a final appointment to give you the results and feedback. The psychologist should brief you in advance to bring your child to the test well rested and not hungry, and ready to answer some questions about school and learning. If you have a private evaluation done, it is your choice whether to share the results with LPS or not.

Another potential route to qualifying your child for the gifted program is to petition the district Steering Committee, which includes counselors, administrators, principals, and the gifted consultant. The Committee meets monthly. Your building's gifted facilitator can arrange to get your child's case on the committee's agenda. The Committee considers any information offered by you, your child's teacher and gifted facilitator, and anyone else knowledgeable about your child. If you have the support of your child's school, it helps enormously. You can also assemble a portfolio of your child's work, special projects, and any other information.

You are welcome to attend the hearing, though this is not mandatory. Your child is also welcome, if you choose. The hearing occurs with all parties sitting around a table. You, your gifted facilitator, or your principal opens the discussion with a brief statement of the case. Others in attendance present their information, and committee members ask questions. It is not unusual for parents to find the appeal process intimidating, but it helps to remember two points: you are the expert on your child, and everyone present is trying to be helpful. After the committee asks questions, it continues the discussion in private, and renders a decision late in the day. Your gifted facilitator will inform you of that decision.

The committee may identify a child as qualified for the gifted program, change the status of a child from gifted to highly gifted, or otherwise decide what services of the program are most suitable for a particular child. Of course, it may also decide

your child is not eligible for the program. There is no formal appeal process except to appeal to the Director of Curriculum. Data gathering may continue and additional information may be presented at another date.

[The LPS gifted website](#) is a repository for much information for gifted parents, including a host of articles about raising gifted children, parent forum information, and considerations for thinking about college. Look for the **Resources by Topic** tab, and go from there.