

*The Michigan Alliance for Gifted Education*

## **ROADMAP FOR PARENTS OF NEWLY IDENTIFIED GIFTED CHILDREN**

This roadmap from the Michigan Alliance for Gifted Education is designed to help the parents of newly identified gifted children secure the educational resources necessary to support the social, emotional, and academic needs of their children. It is not intended as a comprehensive guide to educational planning, but rather as a starting point and decision making tree that can be used repeatedly in the future.

One should first seek some background information. To understand the status of gifted education in the state of Michigan today, as well as the following suggested courses of action, it is helpful to gain a more global view of gifted education past and present, as well as the diversity of programs across the nation.

Despite the variations of programming presently offered to gifted youth across our nation, the vast majority of them were built upon a federal definition of gifted and talented outlined in the 1972 Marland Report to Congress. This report defined gifted and talented children as:

Those identified by professionally qualified persons who, by virtue of outstanding abilities, are capable of high performance. These children who require differentiated educational programs and services beyond those normally provided by the regular school program in order to realize their contribution to self and society. Children capable of high performance include those with demonstrated achievement and/or potential in any of the following areas:

- General intellectual ability
- Specific academic aptitude
- Creative or productive thinking
- Leadership ability
- Visual and performing arts
- Psychomotor ability. (Marland, p. 2).

Although a federal definition for gifted/talented (often referred to as G/T) children was created, there have never been federal mandates requiring states to identify or provide services to this population of students. Identification and provision of services has been left to the discretion of individual states. Individual states have based gifted programming decisions on state definitions of gifted and talented, derived, by the vast majority of states, from the federal definition outlined above.

The federal definition is evolving. The most recent federal definition is as follows:

The term “gifted and talented,” when used with respect to students, children, or youth, means students, children, or youth who give evidence of high achievement capability in areas such as intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership capacity, or in specific academic fields, and who need services or activities not ordinarily provided by the school in order to fully develop those capabilities. (No Child Left Behind, U.S. Department of Education, 2001, p. 544)

As parents of gifted students, it is important to be aware of definitions of giftedness. However, Michigan has no officially recognized definition of “gifted.” It is crucial that the school district’s definition of gifted and talented, identification methods, and programming offered are consistent, or the curriculum may fall short of expectations and not meet the needs of those for whom it was intended. A strong positive relationship between definition, method of identification, and curriculum indicates a well-planned system.

About half of states have legislated mandates that require identification of and services provided for gifted and talented students. Michigan is a state without mandates for gifted education. All decisions on services provided are made at the district level. The Michigan Department of Education (MDE) currently uses the designation “Advanced and Accelerated” instead of “Gifted” in their references to these children and their services. The following is a summary of the services provided at the state level in Michigan as it appeared recently in an issue of *Images* published by the Michigan Alliance for Gifted Children.

### **Gifted Education in the state of Michigan:**

- The state finances the majority of all educational spending in Michigan;
- Michigan **does not** provide state funding to districts to provide gifted and talented services;
- Michigan **does not** mandate gifted education services at the district level;
- Michigan **does not** require teacher certification in gifted education;
- Michigan makes **no** decisions about gifted and talented identification procedures, including at what grade/age gifted education programming begins;
- Michigan **does** legislate age and course requirements for high school diplomas

### **LOCAL**

Local school districts make the following decisions about gifted and talented services because there is no Michigan law, policy or funding:

- in which grades gifted education services will be offered;
- in what subjects gifted and talented services are offered;
- identification procedures for determining eligibility for G/T services;
- the G/T curriculum that will be used;
- the manner in which G/T services will be delivered, including whether to offer pull-out programs, magnet schools, online learning, flexible grouping, or grade skipping;

- whether regular education teachers and school counselors receive in-service professional development on the needs of gifted learners;
- whether the school or district offers after-school advanced learning opportunities or participates in state or national academic or art competitions. (*Images*, Issues 1 and 2, 2007)

Given the fact that Michigan has no laws to support the provision of gifted education **and** that teachers are not necessarily trained to identify or provide services to gifted students, parents of gifted children often play the roles of both advocate and advisor while investigating and securing curriculum for their children. Parents of gifted children frequently interface with school staff members who typically have not received any training in providing appropriate services to gifted learners.

It is essential, therefore, that you educate yourself about the social, emotional, and academic needs of gifted and talented students so that you can identify the characteristics needed in any program you investigate. When interacting with educators/administrators, try to be informative about your child's needs in a matter-of-fact approach. Always keep in mind that teachers and administrators want the best for your child too. Without proper training in this area, it may be confusing for them as well.

The best place to start educating yourself about gifted education is by familiarizing yourself with all of The Michigan Alliance for Gifted Education's website, with the many links on it, particularly those in the Resources section, and by reading a variety of books directed to both parents and educators of gifted and talented students. Good links can also be found at [Hoagiesgifted.org](http://Hoagiesgifted.org). [SENG \(www.senggifted.org\)](http://www.senggifted.org), Supporting Emotional Needs of Gifted, is a link that specifically addresses the social and emotional aspects of giftedness.

Gifted children **and** parents of gifted children need support along the entire K-12 experience. A major goal for the Michigan Alliance for Gifted Education in recent years has been to facilitate the establishment of parent support groups or **CHAPTERS**. Members form parent groups in school districts and regions across the state for the purpose of supporting each other in learning how best to support their children's learning needs, and, because decisions regarding services to gifted students are made at the district level, to collectively approach the school in a cooperative spirit to help provide services that support the GT learning needs in that school/district. (Refer to [Chapters](#) on this website for a listing of Chapters your area and to find the Affiliate (Chapter) Handbook, a guide to forming and revitalizing a group.)

This overview of the environment in which gifted education in Michigan operates helps clarify the following sequence of steps that parents can take to secure educational programming for their gifted and talented student. It is not always easy being the parent of a gifted child/children. Your child's learning needs and the environment in which they learn will undergo many changes in the typical K-12 experience. With that in mind our intent is to provide a decision making tree of sorts to help you approach any problem that may arise along the way.

## GETTING STARTED

1. **EDUCATE YOURSELF.** Start by exploring **all** of the resources on this website. See the reference list below for books to get you started. Give strong consideration to becoming a member of The Michigan Alliance for Gifted Education to stay connected with resources and opportunities for gifted and talented learners in your area. Your membership provides you with information regarding upcoming lectures given by experts in the field of gifted education/parenting as well as social/learning opportunities for your child. Membership also gives you an annual subscription to *Images*, a publication that updates you on everything from legislation to funding, from advocacy opportunities to general support, and all aspects of raising gifted children.
2. **GET TO KNOW YOUR CHILD AND HIS/HER LEARNING NEEDS.** Typically, academically gifted children are able to learn faster than children of average ability levels. They consume larger bites of the curriculum at one time and have difficulty in learning environments where the pace of curriculum is perceived to be too slow. Creative children need learning environments that allow expression of novel ideas without ridicule. Research has shown that having access to other children of similar abilities is important for matching the child socially and intellectually.

Gifted children are as different from one another as they are from the general population. There are degrees of intelligence referred to as *gifted* (IQ of 125-145), *highly gifted* (IQ of 145-160), and *profoundly gifted* (IQ over 160), each of which requires different curricular responses, including pacing of instruction.

“An IQ score in the range of 120-140...suggests that your child needs consistent enrichment and modification of the curriculum in his areas of strength, in addition to a possible grade-skip of one year at the time when he is most out of sync with the regular curriculum. A score between 140-160...suggests the need to consider two, or even three, years grade-skipping over the course of grades K-12 (but not all at once), in addition to consistent enrichment in all academic areas of the curriculum. A score of above 160 IQ suggests minimal years in the K-12 system with some radical forms of acceleration and differentiation, using a formal Individual Education Plan (IEP).” (Rogers, p.50) These differences emphasize the importance of getting to know your child’s learning needs well before making any academic setting decisions. From his lecture of Tuesday, October 21, 2008, “The Truth about Gifted Children,” Dr. Jerry Miller of the University of Michigan ([www.umcf.org](http://www.umcf.org)) stated that the parent of a child with an IQ of 140 or higher almost always needs to find a school setting specifically for the gifted. A public school curriculum will rarely be sufficient for these students.

Parents need to talk with their children about their interests both academically and outside of school. Do they enjoy learning in an environment that is more structured and sequential or prefer a less structured environment that allows movement in the classroom and individual pacing in some academic areas? Are they frustrated when the pace of learning is perceived to be too slow or do they enjoy the extra time to learn more in depth about the topics being discussed? Familiarize yourself with the basic learning styles (see Karen Rogers for a discussion of learning styles/strengths/preferences) and determine the dominant learning style of your child.

**You know your child best, and this will be best tool for seeking the best curricular fit.** Rogers offers a formalized process that leads parents step by step through a series of inventory assessments that help families clarify learning strengths, personality characteristics and traits, learning preferences, cognitive information, and interests to facilitate the creation of a list of educational needs that aid in selection of the best academic options.

## **ACADEMIC SETTING OPTIONS**

Parents of gifted children in Michigan have three main academic options:

- Public schools (public funded)
  - Your resident local district
  - Nearby local school districts/schools of choice
  - Charter schools
- Private schools (tuition payment required)
  - Specifically designated for high ability students
  - Not specifically designated for high ability students
- Home schooling (parent/other taught)

Check with the Michigan Department of Education ([www.michigan.gov/mde/0,1607,7-140-28753---00.html](http://www.michigan.gov/mde/0,1607,7-140-28753---00.html)) for grade level requirements. Parents of gifted children should strive to make the best match of their child's learning needs with the setting that offers the most service toward meeting those needs within their geographical area. There is no right or wrong setting, better school, or optimal path for all gifted students. The academic setting decision should be based on which option offers the best match for the identified needs of your particular child.

One place to gain access to local resources to gifted and talented services is your county Intermediate School District/Educational Service Agency. Ask for the Gifted and Talented/Academic and Accelerated Consultant ([www.michigan.gov/documents/GTCONSLS\\_86912\\_7.pdf](http://www.michigan.gov/documents/GTCONSLS_86912_7.pdf)) servicing your area, or the person handling Advanced and Accelerated (Section 57) funding. This might also be the person in charge of "professional development." The educators filling these positions are usually good resources for information on all three academic setting options. If your county lacks the position of Gifted and Talented Consultant at all (which may be the case because of severe budget cuts in recent years), ask for the individual who is responsible for gifted and talented services in your own district. Chapters of the Michigan Alliance for Gifted Education (discussed above) may also be wonderful resources for information on local services.

## PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEMS IN MICHIGAN

It is an impossible task to stay informed about the gifted and talented service offerings in each local district because services hinge on financial resources that have fluctuated in recent years. (MDE has posted a 9/1/07 listing of services ([www.michigan.gov/documents/cepi/adv-accel2006\\_208127\\_7.pdf](http://www.michigan.gov/documents/cepi/adv-accel2006_208127_7.pdf)), but actual numbers may be skewed due to including AP courses in the high schools.) Many districts that provided gifted programs five years ago have had to eliminate or reduce staff and services. Districts that were closed to residents outside the district last year may be “schools of choice” this year. The gifted consultant or other ISD representative should be able to quickly apprise you of the current status in your district. Consider investigating schools of choice in other local nearby districts if your neighborhood schools do not offer what you need. Charter schools do not have district boundaries - they are open to ALL students – because in most instances parents drive the students to school.

If your district offers a full-time gifted program, it will be based upon one of two philosophies, or a combination of the two: acceleration and enrichment. Gifted programs that use acceleration to meet learning needs move students through the school curriculum at a faster pace. In contrast, enrichment programs focus on broadening the range and depth of topics covered by the basic school program by means that may include guest speakers, field trips, specialized projects, or other activities that provide access to information not generally presented in the school curriculum.

If your school does not offer a full-time gifted program, ask if there is a part-time pull- out program. Under these circumstances, individuals or groups of students meet with a gifted and talented teacher and are provided with special curriculum based on their needs. Frequency and length of program meeting times are dependent on staffing and financial resources within each district. Typically, specialized instruction is provided for part of the school day one or two days per week.

If neither alternative exists in your district, ask how the district meets the needs of advanced and accelerated learners in a regular classroom setting. Many gifted students do well in classrooms that offer some or all of the following curricular modifications:

1. **Differentiation**: modifying assignments based on individual ability levels. This allows greater expectations to be placed on higher ability students in the classroom. This is not a form of acceleration and some students feel that the pace of differentiation is too slow for many G/T learners.
2. **Curriculum compacting and/or telescoping**: involves assessing academic performance levels of individuals or groups of students in an effort to streamline the curriculum to eliminate repetition and insure a full year’s academic growth for all students within each classroom. This technique can be used for single or multiple subject areas.
3. **Single subject acceleration**: allows students to work on above-grade level curriculum in one subject. The student may receive instruction in their regular classroom, online, or be placed with older students in group instruction in a different classroom for the accelerated subject.

4. **Whole-grade acceleration:** a form of acceleration where children are “skipped” over grades. For instance, a child who is currently in third grade would “skip” over fourth grade and enter into fifth grade. It is strongly recommended that the Iowa Acceleration Scale assessment be used by the school to help ensure that the right students have been selected for grade-skipping. This assessment helps measure the social, emotional, and academic readiness of accelerated learners using a multidisciplinary evaluation from parents, teachers, school administration, and school psychologist. The assessment also includes both IQ and academic testing results.

NOTE: further explanation of curricular modifications may be found in the Appendix of the Affiliate (Chapter) Handbook and at [www.hoagiesgifted.org](http://www.hoagiesgifted.org).

The Templeton National Report on Acceleration entitled *A Nation Deceived: How Schools Hold Back America's Brightest Students* ([www.accelerationinstitute.org/nation\\_deceived/](http://www.accelerationinstitute.org/nation_deceived/)) discusses the results of more than twenty-five years of research on the long term impact of whole grade acceleration. The research shows that acceleration is one of the most effective and cost effective ways of meeting gifted and talented students needs because it creates a good fit socially and academically. Read sections of this report by linking above or request a complete copy for yourself and school administrators.

## **Private School Setting**

When investigating private gifted schools it is very important to look for a strong positive relationship between their definition of a gifted child, the identification process used during admission to the school, and the curricular programming provided. If all three elements are similar the program is most likely well planned. For instance, if a private school states that it provides a curriculum appropriate for a gifted learner but fails to require IQ testing or subject area screening for gifted students in other ways, the integrity of the system may be questioned. Likewise, if the definition and identification method are correlated, but not congruent with the school mission statement, investigate the student population the school is targeting.

Private schools for the gifted generally offer an individualized, ability-based (rather than age based) curriculum that is advanced by 1-2 years. Often times the pacing of the curriculum is faster and many of the acceleration forms outlined above are employed.

Refer back to the list of learning needs you created with and for your child to evaluate the fit of each school's program with these characteristics in mind. Inquire about how the school meets needs of all aspects of the gifted child – social, emotional, and intellectual.

Private non-gifted settings may offer programming that meets the needs of your gifted child and again, it is most important to find the setting that is the best fit. If your child needs acceleration, be sure to ask if that is a curricular option. Assume nothing! Most gifted children need time to just think or pursue strong interests or talents. Inquire if the homework philosophy of the school is congruent with your family values and your child's need to pursue other interests or talents.

Some private schools offer a unique educational forum that focuses on ability as well as age for grouping individuals into classrooms. They are the so called “ability-based” programs, of which the Montessori system is a familiar example. These and similar programs provide many services that may meet the needs of gifted children because they offer individualized programming and are worth the time to investigate if available in your area. This environment can be good for self-starters who do not need constant direction.

## **General Tips for Finding the Appropriate Educational Setting**

Independent of the setting under exploration, consider asking the following questions:

1. If your child needs some form of acceleration, be sure to ask **how many** students have access to this curricular option. If the opportunity to advance along the curriculum either in a single subject or by whole grade is rare, then there is need to ask the criterion of advancement. If ability assessment proficiency levels are required to be above 90%, the programming may be too restrictive for the population it is designed to serve. Gifted children gain greater benefit from programs that require proficiency levels above 85%, followed by remediation of the weaker areas identified on the assessment before starting new material. Evaluation of candidates for acceleration should include assessment data from a variety of sources, such as class participation, quality of homework and tests, and teacher observation/interaction with student.
2. If your child is not yet of school of age, explore (if appropriate) the possibility of early entrance into kindergarten. Some schools offer testing at the pre-school level to evaluate the social, emotional, physical, and intellectual appropriateness of this option. Since state funding is not yet offered for such services, many districts will refuse early entrance. Some charter schools, however, do offer “second semester/January” entrance into their kindergarten program if the child’s age is appropriate.
3. Many gifted children have difficulty finding an intellectual peer when attending age-based programs that limit access to other advanced learners and/or older children. No matter what setting you select, be sure the environment offers opportunities for your child to make friends with intellectual peers as well as same-age peers. Specifically ask “If no other student in my child’s classroom can work at the same ability level, are there other activities, classes, or clubs offered that would provide my child the opportunity to meet other high ability children?” Look specifically for extracurricular activities such as Destination Imagination, First Lego League, chess clubs, math clubs, science clubs, photography clubs, theater, music, etc. Ask about future opportunities for dual enrollment ([www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/Qualifying\\_Scores\\_for\\_Dual\\_Enrollment\\_194244\\_7.pdf](http://www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/Qualifying_Scores_for_Dual_Enrollment_194244_7.pdf)), AP, virtual high school ([www.mivhs.org](http://www.mivhs.org)), early and middle college, online programs, and the possibility of mentorship opportunities in grades 9-12. Please also go to [www.michigan.gov/mde](http://www.michigan.gov/mde) and search for your topic of interest.
4. Look for clues that reveal a culture that both recognizes the need for and supports modifications in programming for gifted and talented learners. Are staff members willing to recognize the need for curriculum modifications for gifted learners, or is there a mismatch of staff’s behavior with school philosophy shouting the “all children are special” message? You do not want to place your children in an environment where their curricular needs will not be understood.

5. If you are having difficulty finding a setting in your geographical area that will meet the needs of your gifted child, **LET THE NEED FOR GIFTED PROGRAMMING BE KNOWN**. Although finding resources for gifted children can be very frustrating – calmly, objectively, and politely relay the need for gifted services in your area to local principals, superintendents, school board members, state representatives, state senators, (<http://senate.michigan.gov/SenatorInfo/find-your-senator.htm>), members of the Michigan Department of Education, State Board of Education, and, when needed, Federal Government officials. When talking to these leaders and officials, please remember that every time parents loses their temper while advocating for their children, they run the risk of alienating individuals who can facilitate needed change. Wait until you are less emotional and then write the message or make the call. Providing educational services to students within the full range of academic ability is the daunting task that we ask of our public school systems daily. Whenever possible, recognize the enormous demands on the system and provide information that helps officials recognize the need for specific types of services in your area. For instance, you could relay that IQ and performance measures dictate the need for a setting which offers a faster paced curriculum or accelerated programming options when none are offered in local districts. Encourage administrators to become familiar with the Iowa Acceleration Scale and consider implementing the no-cost option of grade-skipping within the district. (See additional suggestions in the [Affiliate \(Chapter\) Handbook](#), sections 3, 4, & 5.)
6. When the need for curricular modification arises, always conference with your child's teacher first to explore any possible means of accommodating that need in the classroom. Offer your help. Keep a journal of work completed independently at home, as well as work completed in school, to demonstrate your child's ability level in specific areas. Only after all options have been exhausted with the teacher should you seek assistance from the principal. If the problem is not resolved by the principal, feel free to discuss the problem with the superintendent and school board. It is best to follow up the chain of command, giving those individuals with direct contact with your child every opportunity to rectify the situation before proceeding. Recognize that many times teachers and principals recognize the problem/need and agree with your request, but operate within a system that does not support such actions.

## Homeschooling

Many homeschoolers have found success in meeting the individual needs of their gifted children. The decision to home school is based on many complex and personal issues. We encourage you to explore the following resources to investigate the appropriateness of this educational option for your family.

1. [RainbowResourceCenter.com](http://RainbowResourceCenter.com): Resource for learning tools for homeschoolers
2. [Homeschoolreview.com](http://Homeschoolreview.com): Offers reviews of all home school curriculum directly from past customers. *100 Top Picks for Homeschoolers*, by Cathy Duffy, listing home school curriculums available.

## End Notes

As you can see, as the parent of a gifted child you may frequently fill the role of advocate and “resident expert” on the needs of your own child and other gifted children in your school. If you have taken the time to educate yourself about the nature of giftedness, its many forms and levels, and the impact on social/emotional growth and development, then you will have the chance to be successful in this role and effective in gaining many of the services you need. Your child also benefits when you join forces with others who have similar goals because change occurs when a definite need is established. Your voice alone may not be heard, but your message will be heard when you join forces with the parents of the other 80,000 gifted children in the state of Michigan!!

Your membership in the Michigan Alliance for Gifted Education ([Go to Join Today at www.migiftedchild.org](http://www.migiftedchild.org)) makes our message one voice stronger. We hope you will join us.

## References and Resource List

1. Olenchak, R. (1998). *They Say My Kid's Gifted: Now What?* Washington, D.C.: National Association for Gifted Children.
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3. Strip, C. A. & Hirsch, G. (2000). *Helping Gifted Children Soar: A Practical Guide for Parents and Teachers.* Scottsdale, AZ: Gifted Psychology Press.
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5. Webb, J., Meckstroth, E., & Tolan, S. (1994). *Guiding the Gifted Child: A Practical Source for Parents and Teachers.* Scottsdale, AZ: Gifted Psychology Press.

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