

Gifted FAQ: Frequently Asked Questions about Gifted Services and Opportunities

The Wallingford Swarthmore district is committed to providing a rigorous academic program utilizing differentiated instruction, flexible grouping, and enrichment and/or acceleration opportunities as appropriate in order to provide challenges to match students' demonstrated pace and levels of learning. Gifted students will be given opportunities to work with students of similar abilities in order to explore questions, issues, and problems in depth. Opportunities will be based on the unique needs of the student, not solely on the student's classification as gifted. The menu of options may include opportunities to develop critical thinking, problem-solving, leadership, research skills, collaborative learning and independent research and study skills.

What is the Wallingford-Swarthmore gifted program?

There is not one gifted "program" in Wallingford-Swarthmore School District. Students who are identified as gifted will have their individual needs met with an appropriate combination of offerings such as differentiated instruction, enrichment, flexible grouping, leveled classes, honors and AP level opportunities, differentiated pacing/content acceleration, individual-course acceleration, and curriculum extension or replacement work. In most cases, these offerings are also available to students who have demonstrated a need but have not been identified as gifted.

How will I know if my child is gifted?

Many very bright students demonstrate high aptitude and achievement and have many unique gifts that will support success at consistently high levels. Every child has gifts, and can be viewed as gifted in a variety of ways. However, that does not mean the same thing as being identified or eligible for gifted services under Chapter 16. The National Association for Gifted Children estimates that only 6% of the student population in the United States qualifies as "mentally gifted."

Pennsylvania law defines "gifted" as "*Outstanding intellectual and creative ability the development of which requires special services and programs not ordinarily in the regular education program.*"

This term includes a person who has an IQ of 130 or higher or when multiple criteria as set forth in the PDE Guidelines indicate gifted ability. Determination of gifted ability will not be based on IQ score alone. A person with an IQ score lower than 130 may be admitted to the gifted programs when other educational criteria in the profile of the person strongly indicate gifted ability. Determination of mentally gifted shall include a full assessment and comprehensive report by a public school psychologist specifying the nature and degree of the ability.

How does the district identify students?

Parents or teachers may start the gifted identification process at any time by requesting gifted evaluation based on student achievement scores, reading and math assessments, curriculum based measures, surveys, or other performance data. Additionally, the district administers the Otis-Lennon School Ability Test to second graders as a screening instrument to help identify the greatest number of students who may be eligible for gifted services. Scores on this test help the school identify who might be a good candidate for continued evaluation. However, even when initial OLSAT screening does not suggest a need for continued evaluation, sometimes other performance criteria will lead the school to recommend continue evaluation. If continued evaluation is recommended, parents will be asked to sign a Permission to Evaluate (PTE) form; once the PTE is received, the school psychologist will administer an IQ battery of tests and report the findings to the team. The process generally takes two months; within 60 days of the return of the signed Permission to Evaluate (PTE) form, the psychologist will deliver the Gifted

Written Report (GWR) to parents (the exception to the 60 day requirement is the summer; the “clock stops” during the summer, but resumes with the school year restart). Generally, testing should occur after second grade since earlier testing is less reliable. Premature identification can result in inaccurate placement or later ineligibility for continued services. The most important result of testing is to have students placed in the optimal learning environment.

What will happen if my child is not eligible for gifted services?

Most children are not gifted. Even students recommended for evaluation based on early screening criteria may not be formally identified once they complete the evaluation process. Extremely bright children who are not eligible for gifted services will have many opportunities for challenge, enrichment, and differentiation without requiring any special services. Communication between parents and teachers can support the decisions about appropriate differentiation within the regular education program to ensure student needs are met. All students who demonstrate the need for enrichment will be offered the opportunity to develop skills at a high level.

Should I ask to have my child tested in case he is gifted?

The decision should be considered carefully in order to best serve students. Testing can be stressful for students, and it takes a significant amount of time away from instruction. Additionally, students who know the test purpose may feel that they have failed a test, or disappointed others, especially parents, if they are determined ineligible. There should be some indicators that suggest the need for testing. District screening measures and student achievement over time can be good indicators, but they are not the only indicators. Gifted students are not always the highest achievers on classroom or screening measures, but they have unique needs that should be supported. Parents can also review the stereotypes and myths about gifted students in case they are unnecessarily ruling out testing based on faulty perceptions about giftedness. What’s most important is supporting students in developing their own strengths and in understanding that no matter their ability level, success is a result of effort, not just ability.

Won’t my child’s self-esteem be affected if he doesn’t qualify for gifted services?

Not necessarily. There is extensive research on the relationship between self-esteem and student achievement. What research reveals is that adult feedback to students does have a great impact on student motivation and effort. Adults providing feedback to students about success should focus on effort, rather than ability. Students need to know that labels do not define them, but rather that enrichment opportunities will be available if they continue to perform with effort and high levels of achievement. Articles for further reading are listed in the resources section.

If my child is gifted, how will my child’s program be different from other students?

It depends on the unique needs of your child. Gifted students may have variability in achievement levels across subjects. High achievement levels in one area may result in enrichment or acceleration opportunities for that subject, whereas the same student may be appropriately challenged within the regular education program for a different subject. Options for mentally gifted students include enrichment (e.g. differentiated assignments, prompts or assessments, gifted students coming together for challenging projects, seminars and discussion requiring higher-order thinking skills), some acceleration (e.g. math or reading opportunities beyond grade-level), Honors and Advanced Placements courses at the High School, with monitoring and regular education consultation by a Coordinator of Gifted Education who supports the teaching staff in providing these challenges and extensions. Many of these opportunities may be available to non-

gifted students who are very bright and have high levels of achievement indicating a need for additional opportunities.

How does a student become labeled as “gifted?”

A gifted evaluation is conducted by a team of people including the child’s parents, teacher and a certified school psychologist. According to Chapter 16 of the Pennsylvania School Code, a student is “mentally gifted” if they have an IQ of 130 or higher, or demonstrate strong indication of gifted ability based on multiple educational criteria.

What is the appropriate age for gifted evaluation?

Most children should be evaluated when they are in second grade or older. Later testing will achieve the most accurate score. Earlier testing may reflect rich pre-school experiences which are virtually indistinguishable from advanced learning capabilities. Students may be re-evaluated each time their educational placement is changed, and premature identification can result in the child’s later ineligibility for continued formal identification.

Should a parent request that gifted screening continue if initial screening indicates that exceptionality is unlikely?

Parents have the right to request that a gifted evaluation continue with a full assessment of intellectual functioning. Most parents choose to discontinue the gifted evaluation based on the recommendation of the Gifted Multidisciplinary Team to avoid feelings of failure on the part of the student. Even many students who are recommended for further evaluation based on early screening criteria are not ultimately identified as gifted. Parents should discuss concerns with the building level team, especially if a child falls into one of the categories for stereotypes and myths of gifted learners. The team should consider carefully whether the student could be falling into a category of under-identified gifted learners. This is especially true if there is a concern that there may be an underlying disability masking the student’s gifted ability. Students identified as being both gifted and learning-disabled require a special menu of services to reach their full potential.

How do I request a gifted evaluation, and how long does it take?

To request a gifted evaluation, parents should make a written request to the school psychologist or to their child’s principal. Testing can take hours, sometimes over several sessions. Testing should be completed within 60 days of the return of the signed PTE (*Permission to Evaluate* form, which parents will receive following the testing request). Following the testing, a Gifted Evaluation Report (GWR) will be written; if a child is eligible, parents will be asked to attend a GIEP to develop a Gifted Individualized Education Plan (GIEP). This will be created at a meeting to be held within 10 days of completion of the Gifted Written Report (GWR).

What is a GIEP?

A GIEP is a Gifted Individualized Education Plan. The GIEP is developed by a team that includes teachers, school psychologist, and parents, and it will focus on areas of student strength that indicate the need for enrichment. The decision about GIEP eligibility will be based on a two-pronged test: eligibility under Chapter 16 for a gifted services and high levels of achievement that indicate the need for challenge beyond the regular program. Goals are determined by considering present education levels of students. Specially Designed Instruction (SDI) will include modifications to the regular program that provide additional challenge opportunities to meet the needs of the gifted learner. Gifted learners do not necessarily achieve at equally high levels across all subject areas. The GIEP is solely a strengths-based document; if there are areas of deficit or

areas where the student is performing well, but not demonstrating a need for enrichment beyond the regular program, these areas will not be addressed through the GIEP document. Teachers and parents can discuss ways to meet those other needs outside of the GIEP.

How often may a student be reevaluated for giftedness?

A student may be reevaluated one year following his/her last evaluation. It is recommended that parents and teachers discuss whether or not there is new data available that would increase the likelihood of gifted identification before requesting reevaluation.

May parents obtain testing from a private psychologist?

Parents may, at their own expense, contract for gifted testing with a private psychologist. The school district will consider this testing along with multiple criteria, but is not required to accept the results. Parents should discuss with their child's principal or school psychologist the testing services available through the district before they decide.

What opportunities are available for students who are not identified as gifted?

Most students are not identified as "mentally gifted." Most of our students even in the highest level classes are not classified as gifted. However, all students with a demonstrated need for academic advancement are eligible for curriculum enhancement or differentiated learning opportunities. Formal identification as "mentally gifted" is not required for students to access academic opportunities that meet their needs.

If my child was identified as gifted in another school district and transfers to WSSD, will they continue as gifted?

When a student moves from one Pennsylvania school district to another their GIEP remains in place until such time as the student can be reevaluated for services in their new district. A student who has been identified as gifted in another state or district will go through the WSSD evaluation process. WSSD will consider documentation from previous school districts when conducting the reevaluation.

How much does the district receive in federal and state funds to spend on gifted education?

The federal government does not provide funding directly to local school districts for programs and services for gifted and talented students. Pennsylvania does not provide monetary funding to spend on gifted education.

Where can parents get more information about Pennsylvania Chapter 16 and their rights?

Here are two useful links to the Pennsylvania Department of Education website:

- [Notice of Parental Rights of Gifted Students](#)
- [Chapter 16 Regulations](#)

The National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) at www.nagc.org

[The Pennsylvania Association for Gifted Education - PAGE \(http://www.giftedpage.org\)](http://www.giftedpage.org). The mission of Pennsylvania Association for Gifted Education (PAGE) is to advocate for mentally gifted children by working with parents, teachers, administrators, policy makers, and the community to meet the diverse needs of gifted learners.

Related links on the Gifted Education page of the Pennsylvania Department of Education website:

Gifted Education Information for Educators, Parents and Students

Other Resources

[Belin - Blank Center for Gifted and Talent Development](#)

[Carnegie Mellon Institute for Talented Elementary Students \(C-MITES\)](#)

[Center for Creative Learning, Inc.](#)

[Center for Gifted Education - The College of William and Mary](#)

[Center for Talent Development, Northwestern University](#)

[Council on Exceptional Children](#)

[Duke University Talent Identification Program](#)

[Gifted Development Center](#)

[Johns Hopkins University Center for Talented Youth \(CTY\)](#)

[National Association for Gifted Children](#)

[National Center for Accelerated Schools](#)

[NEAG Center for Gifted Education and Talent Development](#)

[PAGE- Pennsylvania Association for Gifted Education](#)

[PEGS - Pennsylvanians for Education of Gifted Students](#)

[Pennsylvania Governor's Schools of Excellence](#)

[Stanford University - EPGY \(Educational Program for Gifted Youth\)](#)

[U.S. Department of Education Home Page](#)

Articles for further reading:

Related to Self-Esteem

Dweck, Carol S. The Perils and Promise of Praise (2007) *Educational Leadership*, October, p. 34-39

Dweck, Carol S. Even Geniuses Work Hard (2010) *Educational Leadership*, September, 16-20
Baumeister, Roy, Campbell, et. al. Does High Self-Esteem Cause Better Performance,

Interpersonal Success, Happiness, or Healthier Lifestyles? (2003) *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, 4:1, 1-44.

Related to characteristics of gifted learners (bright vs. gifted)

Szabos, J. (1989). Bright child, gifted learner. Challenge, 34. Good Apple.

Kingore, B. (Spring 2004). High Achiever, Gifted Learner, Creative Learner. *Understanding Our Gifted*.