Foster Children who are Gifted

Kathleen Casper, Gifted Education Specialist
2015

Are we missing a piece of the puzzle?

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Gifted Characteristics

- What are some characteristics you think of when you think about gifted children?
Federal Definition of Gifted

The Federal Definition of Gifted and Talented in NCLB (US)

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.

(Title IX, Part A, Section 9101(22), p. 544.)
Florida’s Gifted Eligibility Requirements

(1) Gifted. One who has superior intellectual development and is capable of high performance.

(2) Criteria for eligibility. A student is eligible for special instruction programs for the gifted if the student meets criteria under (2)(a) or (b) of this rule.

(Section 6A-6.03019, Florida Administrative Code)

a) The student demonstrates:
1. Need for a special program.
2. A majority of characteristics of gifted students according to a standard scale or checklist, and
3. Superior intellectual development as measured by an intelligence quotient of two standard deviations or more above the mean on an individually administered standardized test of intelligence.

(Section 6A-6.03019, Florida Administrative Code)
b) The student is a member of an under-represented group and meets the criteria specific in an approved school district for increasing the participation of under-represented groups in programs for gifted students.

1. For the purpose of this rule, under-represented groups are defined as groups:
   a. Who are limited English proficient, or
   b. Who are from low socio-economic status family.

2. The Department of Education is authorized to approve school district plans for increasing the participation of students from under-represented groups in special instructional programs for the gifted.

(Section 6A-6.03019, Florida Administrative Code)

(3) Procedures for student evaluation. The minimum evaluations for determining eligibility are the following:
   (a) Need for a special instruction program,
   (b) Characteristics of the gifted,
   (c) Intellectual development, and
   (d) May include those evaluation procedures specified in an approved district plan to increase the participation of students from under-represented groups in programs for the gifted.

(Section 6A-6.03019, Florida Administrative Code)
Gifted Children

Hand out from: http://www.teachersfirst.com/gifted_spot.cfm

Common Characteristics of Gifted Learners
(Caillard-Szulgit, 2010, p.10-11)

- Able to express themselves easily, succinctly, and without hesitation
- Accomplished across a broad range of skills
- Easy recall of facts and mastery of knowledge
- Enjoys detailed discussions
- Enjoys/prefers adult company
- Broad base of knowledge knows many facts
- Delightful sense of humor and appreciates wit
- High expectations of self and others
- Sensitive, intuitive
- Demonstrates intense concentration and attention in areas of interest can become highly focused and absorbed
- Learns quickly
- Likes to assume leadership roles
- Loves learning
- Nonconformist
- Perfectionist
- Observant
- Persistent
- Questioning, curious, inquisitive
- Self-critical
- Can be highly opinionated
- Can be very intense

The Bright Child...
knows the answers
is interested
is attentive
has good ideas
works hard
answers the questions
top group
listens with interest
learns with ease
6-8 repetitions for mastery
understands ideas
enjoys peers
grasps the meaning
completes assignments
is receptive
copies accurately
enjoys school
absorbs information
technician
good at memorization
enjoys straightforward sequential presentation
is alert
is pleased with own learning

The Gifted Learner...
asks the questions
is highly curious
is mentally and physically involved
has wild, silly ideas
plays around, yet tests well
discusses in detail, elaborates
beyond the group
shows strong feelings and opinions
already knows
1-2 repetitions for mastery
constructs abstractions
prefers adults
draws inferences
initiates projects
is intense
creates a new design
enjoys learning
manipulates information
inventor
good guesser
thrives on complexity
is keenly observant
is highly self-critical
### Characteristics of Special Populations of Gifted Kids

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traditional Characteristics</th>
<th>Characteristics of Culturally/Linguistically Diverse Gifted Students</th>
<th>Characteristics of Low Socio-Economic Gifted Students</th>
<th>Characteristics of Gifted Students With Disabilities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Basic Skills</td>
<td>Ability to learn basic skills quickly and easily and retain information with less repetition</td>
<td>May require more repetition or hands-on experiences at an introductory level</td>
<td>Lack of opportunities and access to school-readiness materials may delay acquisition of basic skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal Skills</td>
<td>High verbal ability</td>
<td>May have high verbal ability in native language may rapidly acquire English language skills if they possess academic skills in their home language</td>
<td>Lack of opportunities may delay the development of verbal skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Ability</td>
<td>Early reading ability</td>
<td>May demonstrate strong storytelling ability and ability to read environmental print in home language</td>
<td>Lack of access to reading materials may delay acquisition of reading skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation Skills</td>
<td>Keen powers of observation</td>
<td>May display high levels of visual memory or auditory memory skills</td>
<td>Strong observational skill which are often used to “survive on the streets”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem Solving</td>
<td>Strong critical thinking, problem solving and decision-making skills</td>
<td>Strong critical thinking in primary language; auditory solves problems in creative ways; particularly interested in solving “real-world” problems</td>
<td>Excels in brainstorming and solving “real-world” problems; strong critical thinking ability; rapid decision-making skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persistence</td>
<td>Long attention span - persistent, intense concentration</td>
<td>Long attention span - persistent, intense concentration</td>
<td>Persistent in areas of interest usually unrelated to school</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Albuquerque Public Schools Gifted Task Force; developed by E. Nielsen (1999).

### Characteristics of underachieving gifted students:

- Low self-perceived academic abilities
- Negative attitudes toward school, teachers and/or classes
- Poor self-management/low motivation
- Socially immature, lacking self-discipline
- Unpopular/few friends
- Resistant to influence from teachers or parents
- May become withdrawn in classroom situations

From Davis, 2005, and Delisle and Galbreath, 2002; from slide in https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MfuQvXADdQ
Effects of underachievement

- Self-imposed limits on what is possible; failure is expected
- Negative self-perception
- Burdened from knowing that they are disappointing others
- Failures overshadow successes
- Have feelings of helplessness
- Fail to see connections between effort and achievement

From Delisle and Galbraith, 2002 (from slide in https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MFUQixADdYQ)

Stereotypes and their impact

Stereotypes may make it hard for foster kids to be identified as gifted.

Gifted Characteristics:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eoN2iBDKZxE
(Dan Peters)

Gifted Behavioral Issues:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KTiwv6f9vcU
(Russian news program)
Challenges as a gifted child

- heightened sense of right and wrong, fairness concerns
- increased anxiety, depression
- high energy
- questioning everything
- idealistic
- aware of deeper issues, alert to greater impacts of actions
- impulsivity
- imaginative
- social/communication differences from other kids
- attracted to older peers, younger peers
- striving to fit in (feeling like aliens)
- stereotypes prevent them from accessing services
- underperformance
- masked twice exceptionalities
- standardized programs do not always fit everyone

67% of gifted 8th graders reported being a victim of bullying, compared to 13% of the general population. (Peters and Ray, 2006).

8 out of 42 reports of “suicide related occurrences” were among gifted students (in 69 schools, total population 40,805) (Hayes & Sloat, 1990).
Gifted people may make up as much as 20 percent of the prison population. Given that estimates of giftedness in the population range from 3 to 5 percent, the data suggests that the gifted are overrepresented in the prison population.


Additional complications due to transitory lives and foster care

- records don’t always follow
- screening may not be completed when they move again
- they may not be referred, and may miss full-grade screenings
- they have attachment issues, trust issues, testing issues
- skill gaps from constantly moving
- language issues (ELL students)
- vocabulary gaps
- twice exceptionalities
- behavioral habits (academic and social-emotional)
- medication issues
- peer stresses
- cultural issues
Two percent of students in foster care were identified as eligible for gifted and talented education services, compared to 6 percent of low-SES students and 9 percent of the state’s general student population.

(The Invisible Achievement Gap: Education Outcomes of Students in Foster Care in California’s Public Schools
http://www.stuartfoundation.org/docs/default-document-library/the-invisible-achievement-gap-report)

Think of how gifted support services could impact a child’s life

-self-awareness and self-confidence issues
-the way others think about them
-access to additional support services
-appropriate levels of complexity/challenge
-understanding weaknesses that may cause them to crave inappropriate interventions (self-medication, gang attraction, peer pressures, attraction to illegal or inappropriate challenges, impulsivity, etc.)
- Need for appropriate role models and mentors
- Less anxiety or depression from not having to continuously prove themselves
- More understanding from caregivers
- Access to a whole network of gifted peers/supportive adults in the world, and resources

Caseworkers find that their case loads and paperwork requirements dealing with safety issues leave them little time to focus on school matters.

Schools and child welfare organizations may not understand each other or know their respective requirements.

School officials – especially classroom teachers – are often unaware of which students are in foster care. Without the social history of the child, staff may not recognize the reasons behind aberrant behavior or may place a child in special education unnecessarily.

Staff may be confused about which adult has guardianship of the child or whom to call when academic or behavioral problems arise.

And recent pressure on schools to show gains in standardized test scores may mean schools are focused on the lowest level performers and may not focus on getting children screened mid-year for gifted services.

Improving Access to Gifted Services for Foster Children

- **Training on gifted traits** for foster care providers and support service providers (case workers, foster care families, medical providers, mental health providers)

- **Training on the state and school district gifted education policies and procedures** and an awareness of where to go to ask questions for foster care providers and support service providers.
- **Community partnerships** with the schools and case workers so more people can provide input into a child’s needs for gifted support services (more outreach to community organizations that foster children often interact with, such as Boys and Girls Clubs, YMCA, afterschool programs and camps, etc.)

COMMUNITY MEMBERS MAY REFER STUDENTS FOR GIFTED SERVICES.

- **Specific “education specialist” positions** within agencies who can solely focus on education issues for children in the foster care system.
Data sharing systems so that students who have been screened for gifted services can alert the next district they enroll in that they have started the process already and so services can be monitored.

An example of success: Safe and Smart of NYC

In 1999, the Vera Institute of Justice and the Administration for Children's Services joined forces to create a demonstration project called Safe and Smart. The unique aspect of the project—operated in partnership with the New York City Board of Education—was to place child welfare workers in schools to provide guidance and counseling to foster children and to help resolve academic and behavioral problems.

Safe and Smart specialists focused on improving school attendance and academic performance, but they soon learned firsthand about the many obstacles that foster children face: changes in placement, mandated medical and court appointments that keep them out of classes, and the trauma from past abuse and emotional concerns about their biological families that distract attention from schoolwork.

As caseworkers themselves, they thought they knew a lot about foster children and the child welfare system, but they were shocked by how much they did not know. They encountered confusion over how to register a child for school and found foster parents who were disinterested, felt disconnected from the school system, or thought that school was the job of the caseworker.

Over the three years of the program (1999-2002), the specialists documented these obstacles for the individual children in Safe and Smart and struggled to solve them. After often rocky beginnings, they succeeded in developing strong relationships with school personnel and were recognized by the principals, teachers and guidance counselors as the person to turn to when problems arose. Because they also maintained relationships with the children's foster parents and caseworkers, the specialists were able to reach out to all the adults responsible for the children's well-being.

Gifted Education in Florida Policies and Procedures

See the Florida Plan for K-12 Gifted Education and Resource Guide and other links at:

http://www.fldoe.org/academics/exceptional-student-edu/gifted-edu.stml

Definition:
Section 1003.01 (3)(a), Florida Statutes, (F.S.), defines exceptional student as any student determined eligible for a special program in accordance with rules of the State Board of Education (SBE). Section (3)(b) defines “Special education services” to mean specially designed instruction and such related services as are necessary for an exceptional student to benefit from education. Examples of services are cited.
District Responsibilities for Gifted Services:
Section 1003.57, F.S., specifies each district school board - local education agency (LEA) - is responsible for providing an appropriate program of special instruction, facilities, and services for all exceptional students including diagnosis and evaluation; special instruction, classes, and services and entitles the parent to a due process hearing. (1)(c) specifies “A student may not be given special instruction or services as an exceptional student until after he or she has been properly evaluated, classified, and placed in the manner prescribed by rules of the SBE”.

Access
Rule 6A-6.0334, F.A.C. allows a gifted student with an education plan for gifted services in effect from another state or district to be provided with services comparable to those described in the plan from the other state while the district conducts an initial evaluation and develops or adopts an EP that meets the applicable requirements of Rules 6A-6.03011-.0361 F.A.C.
Acceleration:
- Section 1002.3105, F.S., (ACCEL) requires academically challenging curriculum or accelerated instruction K-12.
- Section 1003.4281, F.S., allows students the option of early graduation and a standard high school diploma if the student earns 24 credits and meets graduation requirements set forth in s. 1003.4282, F.S.
- Section 1003.429, F.S., describes accelerated high school graduation options.

Dual Enrollment:
- Section 1007.271(8) allows students in grades 6-12 to access classes at universities and colleges that count for both high school and college credit for students in grades 6-12, and sets minimum eligibility requirements.
Determining Eligibility for Gifted Services in Florida

Step One: Nomination
Parent/Guardian, teacher or other school personnel, a community member or student may nominate a candidate. This initiates the process of compiling information to determine eligibility.

Step Two: Screening
The district has discretion in determining the screening process. Individual or group assessments or compiled data may be used. The screening should include all students who have the potential to evidence aptitude and achievement. Screening is likely to include a checklist of gifted characteristics.

Student does not achieve screening criteria.

Parent is notified student is not eligible at this time.

Step Three: Referral
Student is referred by district staff for individual evaluation with parent consent.

Does student meet district’s alternative plan for underrepresented populations?

Team of educators reviews all information about student to determine eligibility and plan for EP development meeting.

Step Four: A standard scale or checklist is used to determine whether the child exhibits multiple gifted characteristics (if not already completed during screening). Then an Intellectual evaluation is administered by psychologist.

Score indicates potential eligibility.

Parent is notified student is not eligible at this time.

Score is below state rule requirement.

A referral is the official request for individual evaluation of a student who shows indications of needing gifted education services, often based on the screening process. The school staff initiates the formal move toward an individual evaluation.

The Procedural Safeguards for Students who are Gifted will be provided to the parent/guardian. If the parent/guardian gives written consent, the student should be individually evaluated.
"So Matilda's strong young mind continued to grow, nurtured by the voices of all of those authors who had sent their books out into the world like ships on the sea. These books gave Matilda a comforting message:

*You are not alone.*

- Roald Dahl, *Matilda*