

What Educators and Parents Need to Know About Elementary School Programs in Gifted Education

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Implications for School Planning

What are the options?

The most frequently used program arrangements nationwide are within-class programs, pull-out programs, separate classes, and special schools. Identification of students for any of these programs could range from the top 2 - 25% of a school's population.

Within-Class Programs address the needs of high ability students who are in heterogeneously grouped classes 100% of the time. Students attend classes with their same-age peers. The percentage of high ability students in these classes may vary from 1% to 50% or more.

Pull-Out Programs offer students services in a resource room format for a specific amount of time per week. Many programs operate for a minimum of two hours each week.

In schools with heterogeneous populations, those in **Separate Classes** receive their instruction in homogeneous groups for all content-area courses.

Students attending **Separate Schools** are grouped with peers of similar ability on a full-time basis in schools designated for the gifted and talented.

What key traits are consistent across exemplary models of all four program types?

Differing communities will make different decisions regarding the best educational arrangements for gifted learners. Whatever decisions are made, however, effective programs for high ability students will share some common traits.



Leadership

In an exemplary model, there is a strong administrative voice to represent and implement the program for gifted learners. This individual oversees the development of long-term goals and objectives and communicates this information to everyone in the school and community. This leader ensures that staff and community members understand and support the program.

Atmosphere and Environment

An accepting atmosphere throughout the school promotes a positive attitude toward the program for the gifted and talented among students, parents, teachers, and administrators. In these programs, students are comfortable with their educational and social environments. Staff members are given the time, materials, and training to address the needs of gifted learners.

Communication

Clear and frequent communication is maintained between parents/guardians, teachers, students, and administrators regarding the program. This is accomplished through both general strategies (e.g., newsletters) and individual contacts (e.g., phone calls or meetings). These communications include commendations as well as recommendations about program activities and student performance.

Curriculum and Instruction

Teachers are flexible in matching both curriculum and instruction to student needs. They employ a variety of instructional techniques to complement student characteristics, and students feel that they are appropriately challenged. For example, a match is sought between the pacing of the curriculum and the student's ability in a given subject.

Student Needs

Academic staff and administrators are committed to serving students from traditionally underrepresented populations. They take assertive roles in selecting these students for their programs and focus on being sensitive to the needs of these students once they have entered the programs.

Research Facts

- Children in programs for the gifted obtain higher achievement scores than their gifted peers who are not in such programs.
- A successful program for the gifted does not necessarily depend on the type of programming arrangement (within-class program, pull-out program, separate class, special school). While one type of arrangement may be more beneficial for a particular child, it is the way the program is implemented that determines its impact.
- Parents are the least satisfied with programs for which they perceive there is little or no communication between the home and the school.
- Successful programs challenge students through high level content and pacing of the curriculum, while providing many opportunities for these students to make their own choices and to have control over their learning environment.

- Successful programs focus on the identification of underrepresented populations of students in their written policies and provide support for teachers to address their students' learning needs.
- District coordinators in successful programs invite parents to school events, distribute questionnaires about potential family interaction with the school, and keep parents informed about their child's educational program.

References

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- Delcourt, M. A. B., & Evans, K. (1994). *Qualitative extension of the learning outcomes study* (Research Monograph 94110). Storrs, CT: The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented, University of Connecticut.

What is the NRC/GT?

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