

## **Parenting the Private Life of Gifted Learners**

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### **Abstract**

**This study reports on the socio-emotional life of academically gifted children. At the core of their experiences are excellence, leadership and depression. This study offers parents strategies for helping gifted learners achieve and overcome their various private and public life barriers.**

### ***The Study's Participants:***

There were five parents (of gifted learners) and eight school-aged gifted learners interviewed for this study. The adult are not the parents of the youth. The ethnic makeup of the parents was African American (2), Caucasian (2) and Hispanic (1). The ethnic makeup of the youth was African American (3), Latino (1) and Caucasian (4).

Several of the interviewed youth participate in Recco S. Richardson Consulting's "Gifted Learner's Program." The program offers workshops, college tours, retreats, support groups, preparation for top-tier colleges, career planning and academic course work that is taught at the "first-year" in college level.

### ***Review:***

Historically, the education of gifted learners has focused on their cognitive abilities and ignored their emotional and social needs. It is now an area that is receiving increasing attention as witnessed by on-going research studies. Current research is attempting to discover if gifted children are better adjusted or more at-risk for social or emotional problems. The existing literature is unclear when comparing gifted learner's mental health status and functioning to that of non-gifted learners.

**Definitions/Terms:**

**Academically Gifted:** An advanced learner who requires educational programs and services beyond the regular school curriculum.

**Asynchrony:** A phenomenon in which the intellectual or cognitive development often progresses more rapidly than social, emotional and physical development (Santrock, 2007).

**Perfectionism:** An internal drive to achieve and fulfill high expectations that is self-imposed and becomes a personality trait that affects individuals negatively or positively.

**Socio-Emotional:** An individual's relationships with others (social) and how they feel inside (emotional).

**Characteristics of Gifted Learner's:**

Gifted learners differ greatly from a child who is able to earn A's and B's on their report card. They are as different from each other as day and night. Specifically, the differences include gifted learners having the ability to regularly demonstrate high levels of performance in several domains (see table 1).

**Table #1 Characteristics of Gifted Children**

High Aptitude Performers	Advanced Cognitive Skills	Outstanding Memory
Exceptional Reasoning Skills	Intellectual Curiosity	Given To Individualism
Natural Leadership Abilities	Creative Thinkers	Physical Dexterity
Advanced Test Scores	Develop Faster	Task Oriented
Easily Bored With School	Complete Assignments Fast	Thirst for Knowledge

Gifted and bright student's advancement is significantly beyond the norm in terms of aptitude (more so than potential). Jackson (1998) offered that gifted learners are individuals who have exceptional reasoning ability, intellectual curiosity, desire to give birth to their true selves, act upon their individualism and need to express themselves. These learners at an early age have innate and well-developed intellectual ability, leadership skills, creative thinking and physical dexterity (Peterson, 2006; National Association for Gifted Children, 2009; Federal Elementary & Secondary Education Act 1972).

The presence of exceptional skills and abilities in several areas is a major indicator of domain dominance and academic giftedness. For example:

“Our son was grade skipped a total of three years including elementary, middle, high school and did not achieve challenge/acceptance until the final skip. He has remained at the top of his class.” Interviewee Mrs. Nelson

“Even as an infant she always seemed to master a new skill well before expected or indicated on those developmental charts you get from your pediatrician. My wife and I use to sing to her as an infant and as she got older she would hum the tune and later even sing with precision she reached early adolescence she always seemed more comfortable with the older kids as opposed to kids her own age.” Interviewee Mr. Bronson

“I would have to say that my gifted learner performs well in all academics area and seems to be on the creative side. She draws free hand with ease and that’s with no training, it just comes easy for her. She is good with her hands, like making crafts and stuff like that. We always knew that she was a little a different given the fact that her entrance to this world was not as scheduled by the doctors but on her on schedule. The funny part is that she has marched to the beat of her own drum ever since. I remember being amazed even in grade school how detailed and neat her artwork and assignments were which I thought to be strange for a kindergartener.” Interviewee Ms. Bailey

“I think my baby can accomplish anything that she is motivated to achieve but I think she is most talented in school. I use to get upset when she would say that she does not need to study for a big test until I realized that she really did not. She seemed to have a real good or photographic memory.” Interviewee Mrs. Webb

### ***Methodology:***

A qualitative methods study was utilized to examine the social and emotional life of academically gifted children. With the help of focus groups and face-to-face interviews, this study reports on occurrences of peer pressure, self motivation and depression. The interviews also reported on the parent’s experiences with their gifted learners.

The gifted learners and parents were asked typical intake and pre-screening questions such as age and socioeconomic status. During the interview, they were asked the same open-ended questions regarding their experiences. They were asked approximately 20 open-ended questions that ranged from “What is a typical day in the life of a gifted learner” and “What appear to be the main academic motivators?” to “How does depression effect gifted learners” and “How do gifted learner’s address their poor social skills?” Their responses generated qualitative data.

### ***Data Collection:***

The data collection process utilized standard qualitative tools. The participants’ verbal responses to the interview questions became the raw data, with each response

given equal weight and transcribed verbatim. In addition the researchers' reflections were collected in an attempt to identify the essence of experiences, themes and clusters.

### ***Gifted Children Strengths & Needs:***

Gifted children have the same basic needs as other children. All children need to feel safe, loved, and supported. The stated is foundation to children's emotions and socialization. For gifted children, how they receive and perceive levels of safety, love and support differs from that of other children. In addition at a younger age they progress through the developmental stages faster. In the process, they are required to negotiate task and experiences that are up to three years beyond their chronological age. For example, it is typical for a 12 year-old gifted youth to read at the college level and to score near the top on national normed test that measure academic growth.

When gifted children present as being bad, disruptive or defiant towards adults, it is usually rooted in their being sensitive, intense and driven. Their vulnerability to sensitivity plays out during interactions with family members, teachers and friends. For example, in the book titled "Listen to me, a journey into the experiences of today's youth," Richardson et al. (2009) discussed the quality of relationships gifted learner's had with their parents, teachers and peers. The below quotes from the book describe the strain gifted learners have when interacting with others.

**"You (my parents) can help me reach my dreams by not trying to take over. I love my parents but sometimes they love to take over everything I do. When they take over things, I get frustrated. My relationship with my mother is successful most of the time, but it can be challenging. I feel like it is getting harder and harder to impress her or to make her happy. Sometimes we have our moments when we argue. I get angry when we argue because I cannot say what I really want to. All of the unspeakable words get held up inside and the situations gets worse." Jane (age 13 & 3.75 grade point average)**

**"Sometimes my teachers get on my nerves. When they get on my nerves, I have a smart mouth and talk back. It really bothers me when the teacher calls on me for an answer and I do not have my hand raised. I do not have it raised for a reason, but they call on me anyway. I really do not care for this at all. What really sets me off is when my teachers scold me for not getting the answer right. I think as long as I'm getting A's in their class, they should just leave me alone." Ronnie (age 12 & 3.9 grade point average)**

**"One of my problems is that sometimes I'm not considerate of other people's feelings and opinions. I can get aggravated with people and tune them out." Angie (age 14 & 3.9 grade point average)**

**"Right now, I'm not happy with my parents. My relationship with my father can be disturbing, abusive and feature lots of arguing. My siblings and I have experienced a lot of past abuse at his hands. Due to his level of denial, I have a hard time liking him. My relationship with him has become filled with anger, distrust and disgust. My relationship**

**with my mother is horrible, frustrating, negative and filled with fussing at each other. We love each other but have learned to just not speak it. I'm having more and more trouble dealing with her. She seems to be pushing me away."** Jacob (age 15 & 3.0 grade point average)

There appears to be a set of strengths, problems and needs prescribed specifically to gifted learners. As reported by Peterson (2009) and Matthews and Foster (2006) the fore-mentioned are rooted in their type of giftedness, educational fit and personal characteristics (see table 2).

**Table 2 Gifted Children's Strengths & Needs**

<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Possible Problems</b>
Acquires and retains information quickly	Impatient with others and dislikes basic routine
Inquisitive and searches for significance	Asks embarrassing questions and has excessive interests
Intrinsic and has internal motivation	Strong-willed and resistant to directives
Enjoys problem-solving and is able to conceptualize and is comfortable with abstract/synthesizing	Resist routine practice and questions teaching procedures
Seeks the cause-effect relationship and governing properties	Dislikes unclear and illogical instructions
Emphasizes truth, equity and fair play	Worries about humanitarian concerns
Seeks to organize thing and people	Constructs complicated rules and often seen as bossy
Large facile vocabulary; advanced communication skills and broad information base	May use words to manipulate, can become bored with school and avoids age relative activities
High expectations of self and others	Intolerant, perfectionist and may become depressed
Creative, very inventive and likes new ways of doing things	May be seen as disruptive and out of synch
Intense, good concentration, very long attention span and persistence in areas of interest	Neglects duties or people during periods of focus and resists interruptions
Sensitive, empathetic and desires to be accepted by others	Sensitive to criticism and peer rejection
High energy, alertness and displays eagerness	Frustration with inactivity and may be seen as hyperactive
Independent, prefers individualized work, very reliant on self	May reject parent or peer input and typically do not conform
Diverse interest, vast abilities and versatile	May appear disorganized, scattered and becomes frustrated over lack of time

### **Literature Review:**

Robinson & Clinkenbear (1998) reported that the study of giftedness is related to the psychology of individual differences and has a focus on the constructs of intelligence, creativity and motivation.

Heller (2009) argued that healthy identity formation of advanced learners depends upon the fulfillment of their social-emotional needs. The needs are validation, affirmation, affiliation and affinity. The youth require outstanding parenting and the right educational setting to reach their full socio-emotional potential (see table 3). The extent to which these needs are satisfied (along with the level of academic challenge offered) should be considered when evaluating the appropriateness of educational experiences and settings for advanced learners.

**Table #3 Children's Socio-Emotional Needs**

<b>Type of Need</b>	<b>Definition</b>
Validation	The acknowledgement of one's giftedness by significant others, the sense of being approved and able to produce consistently
Affirmation	The process of reinforcement regarding characteristics of one's giftedness, on-going re-assurance and reminders
Affiliation	The association and feeling of belonging, the identifying with others of similar abilities and interests
Affinity	A person's drive to fulfill their purpose or mission in life, the gravitation towards special interest that encourage the pursuit of knowledge and understanding

### **Gifted Children's Problems:**

There are specific barriers and problems that gifted children must overcome which traditional learners do not have to address as often. Some of the problems are rooted in their participation in accelerated programming. It is held that accelerated and advanced schooling can have a negative effect on gifted student's social and emotional life.

The barriers/problems are frustration, poor peer/adult interaction, self-critical, perfectionism and avoidance of risk-taking.

**Frustration:** For gifted learners, asynchrony is a way of life that can be frustration. This way of life features them seeing in their mind what they want to do and construction of

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such. However, frustration settles in when their motor skills do not allow them to achieve the goal. The resulting emotional outburst can catch parents and educators off guard (Peterson & Canady, 2009).

**Peer/Adult Interactions:** Another challenge area is peer and adult relationships. True to their nature, highly gifted learners attempt to organize people or things. Their search for consistency and truth often emphasizes rules that have the ability to upset relationships and promote poor social interactions.

The stated is because gifted learners tend to be too rigid in their social interactions, need control, lower their standards so as to fit in and have a need to rescue others. The results often lead to peer and adult resentment and further isolation (Peterson, 2006).

**“Well, when my daughter was in grade school her teachers frequently sent home notes about her not responding to their request to move on to the next task when asked. He shared that she was strong willed, bossy and always had to finish what she started.”**

**Interviewee Mr. Bronson**

**“My son is such a critical thinker that it often frustrates most adults. Those that do not know him might think he is being rude or disrespectful. He often struggles with relating to his peers because they may need more instructions or feedback than him to complete a task.”** Interviewee Mrs. Lewis

**Self-Criticism:** Most individuals can be critical of themselves. However, gifted learners take it to the next level. Due to their intelligence and other strengths, they struggle with failure, change and their self-imposed image of how things should be. From this position, they move towards unnecessary levels of self-berating, demeaning self-talk and self-consciousness (Greene, 2006).

**Perfectionism:** Along with exceptional academic skills comes the need for being a perfectionist. In high ability children, perhaps 15-20 percent may be hindered significantly by perfectionism at some point in their academic careers, and later in life (Greene, 2006). For the most part, the innate desire and longing to strive for excellence and mastery is healthy. However, the self-imposed expectations and need to achieve exceptionally in “every area and every time” is more so perfectionism. Perfectionism should not be confused with healthy dedication or a good work ethic.

For gifted learners dedication and excellence moves on to perfectionism when they fail to achieve satisfaction with themselves or a task. In essence, perfectionism blots out the positives associated with task completion and works to paralyze (Matthew & Foster, 2006).

**Avoidance of Risk-Taking:** Due to their fear of failure, public discomfort and over exaggerated self-awareness, gifted learners often avoid risk. They dread the idea of not being the best, the winner and made to play the role of the fool. Their avoidance can lead to underachievement in critical areas (Green, 2006).

### ***Gifted Children & Depression:***

Gifted learner's regularly struggle with depression. For the most part, depression is not understood and is feared by most people. Depression is the resulting emotions and feelings and the associated affects (capacity to act upon or) that individuals can experience. Depression can be defined as and takes on the experience of sadness, sense of inadequacy, feeling despondency, decrease in activities, despair, etc.

It is estimated that 3 percent of all Americans are depressed and that 2 million children are depressed. As well it is held that 10 percent of high school students experience some form of severe depression and depression is casually related to 60 percent of adolescent suicides (Jackson, 1998). Sadly, gifted students are more at risk of suicide than other students.

Depression takes on many forms and can be mild to severe. It has myriads of symptoms that have the ability to impact mental, emotional and physical aspects of a child/person (see table 4).

**Table #4 Symptoms of Childhood Depression**

Poor Eye Contact	Avoidance of Peers	Poor Attitude
Mood Swings	Blaming Others	Negative Comments
Loses Temper/Anger	Harsh Language	Easily Annoyed
Not Tolerant of Others	Vindictive/Spiteful	Passive/Aggressive
Poor Focus/Concentration	Low Energy/Fatigue	Sadness/Depression
Eating Problems	Poor Sleep Efforts	Weight Loss/Gain
Anxiety/Worry	Easily Distressed	Low Self Esteem
Fears/ Phobias	Self Imposed Restrictions	Abundance of Excuses
Regular Sickness/Pain	Isolation/Withdrawing	Easily Agitated
Change in Personal Interest	Inadequate Social Skills	Irritable/Cranky
Feel Empty/Insignificant	Worthless/Guilty Feelings	Poor/Failing Grades

What sometimes is over-looked is the fact that gifted learners psyche often longs to impress or make meaningful change through their knowledge and opportunity to grow as a person. Gifted children's failure to successfully negotiate the fore-mentioned leaves them at-risk to depression (and other mental health symptoms).

Lapsely and Hanchon (2004) reported that psychiatric symptoms, poor adjustment, inadequate self esteem, limited coping skills and depression can be arise as a result of gifted academic abilities. Jackson and Peterson (2003) documented that depression frequently interrupts the daily functioning of highly gifted adolescents. The depression often goes unnoticed because gifted youth are able to mask their emotions

rather well. For gifted learners, counter-productive levels of depression become an issue because of feeling ashamed of their inability to resolve their dilemmas or problems.

### ***How Parents Can Help Depressed Children:***

Many parents wonder why their gifted child is depressed. One reason why they are given to depression is because gifted students typically are high achievers, prefer complexity, are intense and can consider many contradictory ideas at one time. To assist a child who is depressed, parents consistently should do the following.

**Simplify Life:** Depending on the level and intensity of a child's depression, parents may find it necessary to simplify their life (and the life of their child). A parent's level of stress, worry and fatigue is not easily ignored by children and can directly affect a child's emotional responses to life. To simplify the life of a child, parents can provide on-going emotional and social support, a sense of being safe, overall acceptance and evidenced unconditional love.

**Acknowledgement of Depression:** For most of us, there is a temptation to enter denial regarding the presence of childhood depression. Parents must be able to call childhood depression what it is and not blame themselves for the issues at hand. Failure to do so can leave the door open for a child to avoid discussing their sad feelings, fail to learn to cope and begin escaping by creating another reality or lying. As a parent it is important to talk with your child about their depression. By discussing, acknowledging and addressing the depression, children have a better chance of moving on emotionally.

***“I guess I’m supposed to be the wonder child or something. I do lots of things wrong, sometimes on purpose. My mom never blames me, even when she knows I’m guilty or at fault. It is like she refuses to accept the fact that I’m not perfect. I have tried to tell her about my sadness and overall dislike of the way I look. She cannot bring herself to discuss this with me. Megan (age 12 & 3.6 grade point average)***

***“The truth is I’m depressed. Everyone sees it except for my parents. They think I’m just lazy and attention seeking. No matter how much I try to tell them in words and with my actions, they will not discuss my feelings and my low self esteem with me.” Abigail (age 16 & 3.7 grade point average)***

**Be The Best You:** At the core of depression are feelings of inadequacy and insufficiency. Parents can help children overcome the stated by instilling in them the need to “Be the best you can be.” This can be accomplished by reminding children that they do not have to compare themselves to others, they have unlimited abilities and special qualities, everyone has flaws and no one is perfect. Children who suffer from depression need their parent's assistance when the decision comes to dedicate themselves to subjects such as academic excellence, self-acceptance, searching for the meaning of life and accepting.

**“I think getting harassed and teased about getting all A’s caused my daughter to go through periods of depression. The excessive name calling and lack of friends were not easy for her to deal with.” Interviewee Mrs. Bailey**

**“She really wanted friends and to just fit in as a child. But because she was so bossy and matter of fact all the time, she struggled to relate with her peers. However, I will say that her ability to focus intensely on things of interest has nurtured her into loving independence.” Interviewee Mr. Bronson**

**“My parents really do not talk to me. What they call talking is really fussing. Sometimes I wonder if they know how to relate to me. They say they want the best for me, but honestly how can they help me if they do not talk to me. The main thing I want from them is help feeling normal.” Terry (age 14 & 3.8 grade point average)**

**Medication & Counseling:** The last thing a parent desires to hear is that their child may benefit from medication and counseling that addresses on-going depression. Research indicates that medication and counseling can help children manage their emotions, respond to life better and provide support during stressful times.

**Know Thyself:** Parents of gifted learners consistently report the need for their child to get to know themselves. By knowing themselves, children have a chance to self identify what causes them to become sad and depressed. With the help of parents, the identified patterns and themes can be better managed and eventually defeated. Many parents are surprised at their child’s responses when they ask them specific questions about depression.

**Rest & Exercise:** Adults are not the only ones who need regular rest and exercise. Today’s youth are not nearly as active and well rested as they should be. As a result, their pent up frustrations and on-going depression have no outlet or solution. Proper rest and exercise is an excellent way to resolve daily experiences that can push children towards sulking, sadness and anger. Parents play a significant role in the level of rest and exercise that their child gets. To ensure proper rest and exercise, parents find it necessary for them (and their children) to have a regular schedule, establish proper boundaries, limit the number of visitors to the home, avoid extra long days and restrict their child’s amount of time spent watching TV/playing video games.

**Proper Diet:** The insightful parent has come to realize that there are certain foods that encourage depression, emotional cycles and counter-productive experiences. The simple act of removing “depression producing” foods from the menu can almost improve a child’s emotions overnight. A parent’s quick computer search will reveal which foods promote depression and which encourage optimum emotions.

**Teach Life Skills:** For gifted children (and others) regardless of the cause of their depression, successful responses require the ability to negotiate circumstances. Parents have the unique and treasured ability to train their child in life coping skills such as

character, patience, kindness and good decision making. These skills have the ability to head off emotional episodes such as depression, suicidal thoughts and worry.

### ***Educating Gifted Children:***

Most teachers enjoy instructing gifted children. They find the gifted learners intelligence, love for knowledge, insightfulness and person drive to be refreshing and hopefully contagious to other children. Like a flu shot, gifted learners have the ability to inject into their teacher energy and a renewed passion for teaching.

However, there are negatives associated with having the responsibility of teaching highly motivated and smart children. Research indicates the following.

**Maturity:** It can be tempting for teachers (and parents) to incorrectly assume that gifted children are mature enough to handle classroom assignments or expectations that are expected of older students who are their classmates.

**Attention:** Though they are academically talented, some gifted learners lack sufficient independence, thus they may demand more than their share of the teacher's attention.

**Motor Skills:** In critical areas such as expressing themselves verbally and in writing, some gifted learners do not have adequate fine motor skills. The motor skills are required when writing top notch essays and completing language arts assignments.

**Time Management:** Gifted learners can struggle with being organized and planning. As a result they tend to procrastinate or over-indulge in assignments. The stated can create stress, tension and physical ailments.

**Social Skills:** Gifted learners typically have under-developed social skills. Due to their low self-confidence and esteem issues, they often opt to avoid interacting with others, rather work alone on projects, dread making friends and tremble at the thought of taking part in a new activity/situation.

**“My daughter often complains that she does not like working in groups because all the members do not work as hard and she often ends up doing all the work. She seems to get frustrated the most when she does not have the option to work independently.” Interviewee Mrs. Web**

**“If the assignment requires it, he will follow the directions and work with his peers. I honestly believe he likes to learn new things on his own. He has no problem sharing or debating with his friend despite the fact that he is three years younger than them.” Interviewee Mrs. Nelson**

### ***The Best Curriculum:***

Gifted learners come from all walks of life and ethnic groups. For example, African American students comprise 21 percent of the nation's public and 12 percent of students enrolled in gifted student's programming in America.

In an article titled "They won't teach me: The voice of gifted African American inner-city students," Harmon (2001) documented that the majority of gifted educational programs' curriculum is not multicultural in nature. A multicultural curriculum would affirm individual differences and provide the inclusiveness that all students need. This type of curriculum benefits all ethnic groups, not just minorities. Curriculum of this nature (along with accommodation of learning style, usage of cooperative learning, regular classroom positive reinforcement, student-centered classrooms and mentoring) has the ability to offset gifted students' academic under-achievement.

### ***Counseling Gifted Children:***

Although most children experience similar difficulties in growing up, gifted youth tend to experience more conflicts earlier, especially in school. The conflicts are often due to the incongruence among their developing abilities, interest, environments and social expectations (Heller, 2009).

In an article titled "Addressing counseling needs of gifted students," Peterson (2006) stated that only 62 percent of accredited graduate school counseling programs offered training on counseling gifted students. The untrained counselor may not detect certain elements and experiences presented by identified (and non-identified) gifted learners. For example, many gifted children experience social and emotional concerns that peers throw at them. As well, some under-achieving bright students are easily bored and academically frustrated. They need the assistance of a school counselor to get on track.

Gifted individuals must learn to adapt to schools and to a society that frequently fails to praise their talents and often rejects them altogether. It is this shared experience of social disapproval that gives way to gifted students deciding to hide their gift, isolate themselves or enter into depression.

### ***Parenting Gifted Children:***

Parents particularly need to understand the characteristics that may cause gifted children to seem different or difficult. Supportive family environments can counter unhappy social and school experiences. The successful parent needs information so as to effectively nurture and advocate for their child. One such area of information that is needed by parents is helping their child with overexcitability. Overexcitability is more than the act of being excited. It is an approach to life that is based on how individuals

relate and respond to stimuli, identify with others and manage their emotions. Tieso (2007) stated that patterns of overexcitabilities regularly are found in identified gifted students and their parents. The patterns help to understand the characteristics and creativity of gifted children.

To assist their bright child, parents may have to go beyond the typical call of duty. We have identified several concepts that parents (and others) can utilize to enhance the social and emotional well being of gifted learners. For maximum results, the concepts should be offered as part of a community-based program, not necessarily as part of a public school's curriculum. The concepts are as follows.

**College Bound Programming:** Efforts should be made to enroll smart and gifted/ students in an intensive program that captures their creativity and imagination. The programming should offer preparation for standardized test (ACT/SAT); schedule on-campus college visits and assists students with college applications and enrollment.

**Support/Learning Groups:** Academically gifted youth need support and friendship. Groups that are of the support/learning format help to addresses specific aspects of young person's academic, social and emotional life. The group sessions should feature 10 participants or less, last 60 to 90 minutes in length and meet six to nine consecutive weeks.

**After School Programs:** The hours of 4:00 pm to 7:00 pm are an excellent time for gifted learners to explore their world, exercise, learn new skills and develop friendships. To the delight of parents and other caring adults, the last several years features public schools offering after school programming at minimum to no cost.

**Career Development/Planning:** More so than other children, academically smart youth are future leaders and professionals in the work place. As a result, an overall plan that assists them to experience maximum work-related goals, strategies and income is needed. Parental support and sacrifice is required in order for gifted learners to be prepared for their future.

**Work & Learn Opportunities:** Because of their maturity level and advanced cognitive skills, gifted youth have the ability to excel when given work and learn opportunities. The experience can create an age-appropriate sense of responsibility and commitment towards the community.

**Character/Leadership Development:** As children, most adults were not afforded a chance to enhance their character, social skills or leadership abilities. The intentional creation of a positive environment that encourages personal development and purpose serves the needs of gifted learners well. Hundreds of loving parents have come to realize that conferences and workshops are excellent forums that promote the stated skills. The key is for parents and other adults to be willing to not only transport youth to such programming but to also pay the associated fees for the activities.

**Academic Academies/Workshops:** The key to gifted learner's scoring well in accelerated/advanced courses and on standardized tests are comfort, competence and exposure to specific foundational academic subjects.

### ***More on Parenting Gifted Children:***

To better assist gifted learners, it is important for parents to become involved in professional groups at the state and local level. Almost all decisions about the education of gifted learners takes place at the stated level.

**“I must say we have not had any significant challenges. However, learning and finding out what services were available and advocating for my child’s educational needs was often a challenge.” Interviewee Mrs. Nelson**

**“I suspected in 5<sup>th</sup> grade that my daughter needed testing of some sort, but I did not know what was available. I trusted the teachers when they said she had no special problems and was experiencing normal development. If I could do it over again, I would question more and talk to other parents more. Most public school teachers are not trained in gifted education, let alone recognizing twice-exceptional children.” Interviewee Mrs. Web**

School district officials recognize that gifted and talented students are individuals who have unique needs. However, what can hinder local school's ability to service gifted youth is state laws, local policies and the availability of funding. In the face of limited funding and the need to ensure that non-gifted learner's reach acceptable annual yearly academic progress, a growing number of public school districts, private schools and public school academies (charter schools) are stepping up to the plate and recognizing the educational needs of gifted learners.

**“I love Carman-Ainsworth School District. My son’s teachers recommended him for a program at school when he was in the second grade. The program was called “Highly Able Learners (HAL). He always completed his work rather quickly and rarely brought homework home which he still does in high school right now.” Interviewee Mrs. Lewis**

In our current times, schools are now offering more and more accelerated courses, advanced placement classes, educational plans, in school planning courses for the ACT/SAT and yearly academic sequencing. The fore-mentioned can enhance the traditional K-12 educational experience of gifted learners.

### ***Closing Views:***

As a society, it is our responsibility to monitor and take care of the socio-emotional and academic life of gifted learners. It is such tending to and care that is not only necessary, but well deserved. We can no longer continue to focus the majority of our attention on at-risk learners or marginal students.

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Today's gifted learners have social and emotional concerns that need to be addressed. We can not expect traditional K-12 schooling to meet their total need. As a result, parents and other caring adults must seek out community-based programming that challenges gifted learners.

**“I try to give my daughter what she needs that the school does not provide with community activity. She has attended book clubs, dance class, and even modeled at one point.” Mrs. Bailey**

**“I found that my daughter flourished when she was given the opportunity to socialize with her peers outside of school as opposed to routine structured learning experiences. She also played in the band at school.” Mrs. Web**

**“Do not let school administrator's label your child as difficult because they do not have a classroom structure that meets their need. Do your research and keep advocating. The administrators at public schools really do not have much of a clue when it comes to gifted student's needs. They are so far out of the box. Do not accept the schools options as your child's only choices.” Interviewee Mrs. Lewis**

**“You know your child better than anyone. They know themselves and what they need. Trust yourself and your child as you pursue educational opportunities for them. I was certain to let my daughter make decisions about school. I have learned that she really does know what she needs and what will work for her.” Mrs. Bailey**

**“If your child is happy, go with it. If your child goes from loving school to hating it, there is a problem. Do not wait for it to get better or wait to pull them out of classes because it makes more sense to do so at the end of the year. The most important thing is to nurture your child's love for learning.” Mrs. Web**

**“Allow your child to follow their interest. They will amaze you at their ability to learn effortlessly when it is a subject they are interested in.” Do not be afraid to do things differently than the schools traditional instructional plans. Accept the fact that gifted learners do things differently and do best when given the opportunity to work and learn in their own way.” Mrs. Nelson**

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