

Dear Parents of Bright/Gifted Children,

My name is MaryGrace Stewart. I am a gifted education specialist, the Coordinator of the MAGE Service Network, its parent liaison, and the current president of the organization. Thank you for coming to our web site. I have a few topics below that I hope will help you.

### **Framing Gifted Education in MA**

- MA does not have requirements by the state or municipalities to identify or provide different content or services for gifted students.
- Only about 5% of MA public school districts in MA have gifted programs
  - They vary considerably in the way they identify students, the grades they serve, and what they include.
- MA educators in both public and private schools, are not required to have any training in gifted education.
  - Most educators mean well, but without information, training, and motivation, they often believe such myths as
    - Gifted kids will be fine on their own
      - They will not. They need to learn not wait.
    - Acceleration is psychologically and/or emotionally harmful
      - The opposite is true
      - Gifted children need a variety of peers and friends of different ages
    - Gifted education is elitist
      - Not if identification is done ethically and programming is culturally responsive
      - As it is now, only the financially well off can afford special schools and classes.
      - That's why gifted education needs to be in public schools
    - Gifted education costs a lot of money
      - There are resources in schools already that could help gifted students a lot at no cost.
  - Asking a general education teacher, counselor, or administrator to provide gifted education is like asking a general practitioner to do surgery.
    - It's not fair to them or the child
    - They may be able to be guided by a gifted education specialist, but it may not turn out the way one would hope.
- There are things that most schools have, that can help but they need to be flexible in the ways they are used. For example
  - A library and librarian
  - Computers
  - Subject specialists
  - A person the child can go to for support who truly understands the child's needs
  - Acceleration by topic, chapter, unit, subject, or year
  - Parents or schools can provide a tutor for a certain subject
  - Pre-assessments followed by alternative lessons
    - Alternatives can include

- Certain technology & websites
  - Advanced books on the same theme as the class
  - Real world problem solving projects
  - Student extension contracts that increase depth and complexity
- Things a school can do that are not extremely expensive or difficult
  - Gifted education professional development of
    - general education teachers
    - administrators
    - counselors
  - Continued mentoring of the faculty and staff by a gifted education specialist
  - Accountability for
    - Increasing the knowledge of gifted students
    - Supporting the social and emotional needs of the gifted

### **What is giftedness?**

- Federal definition
  - “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 and activities not ordinarily provided by the school in order to fully develop those capabilities.”
- Renzulli (my paraphrase)
  - Intersection of above average ability, creativity, task commitment
    - In an interest area
    - Affected by outside influences
- NAGC
  - “Children are gifted when their ability is significantly above the norm for their age.
  - Giftedness may manifest in one or more domains such as; intellectual, creative, artistic, leadership, or in a specific academic field such as language arts, mathematics or science.
  - It is difficult to estimate the absolute number of gifted children in the U.S. and the world because the calculation is dependent on the number of areas, or domains, being measured and the method used to identify gifted children. However, many consider children who are in the top 10 percent in relation to a national and/or local norm to be a good guide for identification and services.
  - It is important to note that not all gifted children look or act alike. Giftedness exists in every demographic group and personality type. It is important that adults look hard to discover potential and support gifted children as they reach for their personal best.”
- My rule of thumb
  - Like a seed or a shoe size
  - Ability to perform a year or more above grade level in any human endeavor
    - Might be obvious, might not
    - Is affected by outside influences such as nurture and adversity
- Common characteristics

- See <http://www.nagc.org/resources-publications/resources/my-child-gifted/common-characteristics-gifted-individuals>

### How do I know if my child is gifted?

- Look at the definitions and information above. If they fit some of those then they probably are.

### Where do I get my child tested?

- At school
  - If you put in a request for testing by your school they should do it.
  - They may want reasons
    - Suggest something is significantly wrong at school.
      - They only understand a deficit model
        - Behavior problems, anxiety, depression, rages and tantrums, possible ADD, Asperger's, underachieving
- Outside of school
  - Possibilities suggested to us by various parents (in alphabetical order)
    - Dr. Rafael Castro, rcastro@iccdpartners.org, Boston, MA
    - Dr. Louise Eckart, Arlington, MA
    - Michael Fitch, (Psycho-Edu. Testing Svcs.) mike\_f761@netzero.com, Granby, MA
    - Dr. Roberta Green, (School Neuropsych. Associates) East Longmeadow, MA
    - Dr. Lauren Killeen, Watertown, MA
    - Dr. Deidre Lovecky, Providence, RI
    - Jennifer Markow, jenmarkow@gmail.com, South Hadley, MA
    - Dr. Catherine Monaco www.counselingcenter.com Nashua, NH
    - NESCA (Neuropsych. & Ed. Services for Children) 617-934-2347, Newton, MA
    - Dr. Kathleen Salomone, (School Neuropsych. Associates), East Longmeadow, MA
    - Dr. Elizabeth Smith <http://www.mind-works.org/DrSmith.html> Natick, MA
    - Dr. Magdi Sobeih, MD (Pediatric Neurologist) Integrated Center for Child Development www.iccdpartners.org , Newton and Canton MA
    - Dr. Trevor Tebbs, Bomoseen, VT
    - Dr. Aimee Yermish, DiVinci Learning Center, Stow, MA
- Listing here *is NOT an endorsement* by MAGE or any of its directors, members, or associates.
- We strongly suggest interviewing them first!
  - Your child needs to be comfortable with the tester.
- The above psychologists are in private practice.
  - Ask your healthcare provider if they cover it and if so, under what circumstances.

- Why do you want your child tested?
  - What does it get your child?
    - An IQ score *might* be helpful if it's high in at least one area
    - Also possible it will not help
      - Schools are not required to do anything for gifted students
      - Whatever they do is because you have convinced them

### **What can I do to help my child?**

- Rethink the idea of school and your child's education
  - More like a quilt than a blanket
    - Piece together experiences
    - Follow their interests
  - Go to <https://www.massgifted.org/for-parents>
    - Presentations
      - A Quilt for their Talents
      - A Venn Diagram for School Success
- Learn a lot
  - About what gifted education is and what it includes
    - Excellent resources
      - Nagc.org
        - especially <http://www.nagc.org/resources-publications/resources-parents>
      - Sengifted.org
      - Accelerationinsitute.org
      - Massgifted.org
      - The work of
        - Drs. Renzulli & Reis (University of CT at Storrs)
        - Dr. Carol Ann Tomlinson (University of Virginia)
        - Dr. Sandra Kaplan (University of Southern California)
        - Dr. Donna Ford (Vanderbilt University)
        - They all have YouTube videos and resource on their websites
  - About your school district
    - Check mission statement, goals, and strategic plan
      - Seek common ground
    - What are all of the resources that they have?
    - Is there precedent for any acceleration or other appropriate practices?
    - The nature of all administrators and board members
      - Who is open minded and/or flexible, and who is not
    - Professional development policies and practices
  - Get coaching from a gifted education specialist who knows MA (That's likely to be me.)
- Develop positive relationships with
  - Administrators and Teachers
    - Drop off yummy food in the teacher's lounge and ask for nothing

- Provide needed consumables for the classroom such as tissues
- Help administrators see gifted education as a priority
  - Why it's important to...
    - them, their school, their district
    - students
    - society at large
- Provide support
  - Offer to pay for professional development and continued support
    - MAGE providers are not expensive
  - Provide helpful resources
    - Books, supplies, materials
  - Offer to champion of the cause
- Have meetings
  - With administrators regarding your child
    - Present the conundrum
    - Listen to their point of view
    - Ask, “what if...” “why not...” and “in what ways might we,” questions
    - Set deadlines for things to happen
    - Follow-up
    - Remain calm!
  - Go to school committee meetings
  - Unite with similar minded parents in the school or district
  - Work your way up the ladder
    - Teacher
    - Principal
    - District curriculum coordinator
    - Superintendent
    - School committee
    - Legislators
- Be persistent and respectful
  - Never give up
  - Remember they are professionals even if they are unaware, ill-informed, or rigid
  - Remember that you are your child's legal guardian, not them!
    - As such, you cannot allow your child to be neglected

### **What should I be asking for?**

- Flexibility
- Some more specific options are:
  - In class differentiation as per Carol Ann Tomlinson's methods of Differentiation of Instruction
  - Compacting the Curriculum
    - [https://gifted.uconn.edu/schoolwide-enrichment-model/curriculum\\_compacting/](https://gifted.uconn.edu/schoolwide-enrichment-model/curriculum_compacting/)
  - Alternative assignments
    - Extensions a la Dr. Sandra Kaplan of USC
    - Real World Problem Solving a la Dr. Joe Renzulli of UConn

- Use of teaching websites at the child's level of readiness such as
    - Khan Academy
    - Renzulli Learning Systems
- Acceleration by topic, chapter, unit, subject, or grade
  - See <http://accelerationinstitute.org/>

### **What can I do to help change this for all children?**

- Look at the Advocacy page on our website [massgifted.org](http://massgifted.org)
- Participate in MAGE's advocacy group
- Contact Katharina Elbert at [katharina.elbert@yahoo.com](mailto:katharina.elbert@yahoo.com) or Gerry Mroz at [gerrymroz@gmail.com](mailto:gerrymroz@gmail.com)
- Contact your legislators and let them know your concerns and experiences
  - Email is good, phone is good, meeting is very good

### **Why don't we have gifted education in MA?**

- Political culture of independence
  - Remember the Boston Tea Party?
    - People don't like someone from far away, even if that's just Boston, taking their money and telling them what to do.
- Lack of federal mandate
  - Federal government passes this issue to the states
  - MA passes it to the districts
- MA law requires state to fund any education mandates
- Lack of teacher preparation and training
- Belief in myths about giftedness and gifted education
- MA has been #1 for education on the "Nation's Report Card" for 12 years in a row
- Giftedness is a minority
  - But it's still a lot of children
    - Approximately 150,000 when considering all domains

### **Connections and Support**

Because this is about a 15 year journey I suggest you get connected with others in your situation. Join MAGE. It's not expensive and it gets you discounts, information, and a lot of services. Attend the events. Use the services. For example, membership gets you a year of Renzulli Learning Systems home edition for free which usually costs double what a membership costs. Another suggestion is to join NAGC and get their Parenting for High Potential magazine. It's a great resource.

We are always here for you!

Bye for now,

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