

A PARENT'S GUIDE TO

# Gifted Education in Pennsylvania



*For 50 years*  
*Leadership in Gifted Education*



**The Pennsylvania Association for Gifted Education**  
with support from the Pennsylvania State Education  
Association and the Pennsylvania PTA

Greetings,

On behalf of the PAGE Board of Managers, we are happy to present this "Parent's Guide to Gifted Education in Pennsylvania". Navigating the right course for your child can often times be difficult and confusing. This guide is meant to get you started in charting the right course.

PAGE is here to help parents and advocate for gifted education in the state of Pennsylvania. PAGE was instrumental in helping to rewrite Chapter 16, the gifted education chapter. And don't let anyone tell you that gifted education doesn't fall under the Bureau of Special Education. It does! So, go out and get started. As a parent, you are your child's first teacher. You know your child the best. Endeavor to get the best and most appropriate education for your child.

Sincerely,

Dr. Judith Mosse  
President, PAGE

Caroline Allen  
Parent Liaison

## Deciphering those Acronyms!

AP	Advanced Placement
GIEP	Gifted Individualized Education Plan
GWP	Gifted Written Report
IB	International Baccalaureate
IQ	Intelligence Quotient
IU	Intermediate Unit
LEA	Local Education Agency
MDE	Multi-Disciplinary Evaluation
NORA	Notice of Recommended Assignment
PAGE	Pennsylvania Association for Gifted Education
PDE	Pennsylvania Department of Education
PHC	Pre-hearing Conference
RTI	Response to Intervention



## Become an Advocate for Gifted Education

Most of the important decisions about gifted education are formed at the state level, making your state legislature a great place to begin your advocacy efforts. In many cases, state legislative initiatives are coordinated by PAGE with support from individuals and local parent groups.

The tools below are designed for state association leaders, legislative committee leaders, or for a group of individuals assigned the responsibility to develop a state legislative agenda.

1. **Issue/initiative Assessment:** Take stock of the "big picture" of your issue(s).
2. **Supporter/Opponent Assessment:** Who will you be working with in support of your issue? Are there groups that do not support what you propose? Consider the assets, and the obstacles
3. **"Intelligence Gathering":** It is imperative that you have information about the legislative process itself, who the key legislators are, as well as information that supports your issue and rebuts any arguments against you.
4. **Association Resource Assessment:** It's time to take stock of what support your association can produce to bring the issue into the spotlight.
5. **Action Steps:** Now that you have determined what the organization wants to do, and is able to do, make a plan to utilize those resources. This may require that you triage among multiple issues having different levels of importance or different likelihood of success.

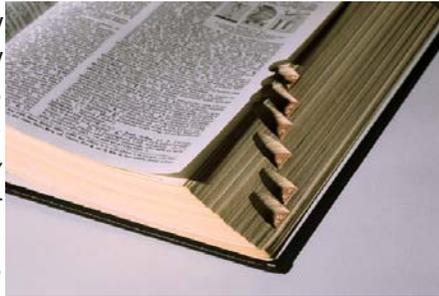
*Adapted from the National Association for Gifted Children website at;  
[www.nagc.org](http://www.nagc.org)*

**Remember!** *Individuals or small groups of individuals such as local affiliates or interest groups from single school districts can follow these steps and become advocates for their gifted students in their communities, school districts or for their individual child! **Take action!***

## Definition of Gifted Education

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*Mentally gifted is defined as outstanding intellectual and creative ability, the development of which requires specially designed programs or support services, or both, not ordinarily provided in the regular education program. (22 Pa. Code §16.1)*



Intellectual ability is not equated with an IQ score alone. Intellectual ability is and should be a reflection of a range of assessments including a student's performance and potential.

### **IQ 130 or higher**

*The term "mentally gifted" includes a person who has an IQ of 130 or higher, when multiple criteria as set forth in Department Guidelines indicate gifted ability. Determination of gifted ability will not be based on IQ score alone. The determination shall include an assessment by a certified school psychologist. (22 Pa. Code §16.21(d))*

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** No one test or measure is sufficient to determine giftedness, and the evaluation and testing literature recognizes that there is a margin for error in any standardized testing. The standard error of measurement also applies when reporting IQ.

**IQ lower  
than 130?**

*A person with an IQ score lower than 130 may be admitted to gifted programs when other educational criteria in the profile of the person strongly indicate gifted ability (22 Pa. Code §16.21(d))*

If a student's IQ is less than 130, other factors, such as academic performance, demonstrated achievement and other observed skills must strongly indicate gifted ability in order for that student to be admitted to a gifted program. Because disabilities and bias factors may mask gifted abilities, districts are cautioned to examine discrepancies between ability assessment results and academic achievement or demonstrated skills, and discrepancies among ability subtests.

**Background**

In 1989, the General Assembly directed the State Board of Education and the Department of Education to overhaul the special education regulations and standards, including those pertaining to gifted education (Act 48 of 1989). The state board and the department responded by publishing new regulations and standards, effective July 1, 1990, that included provisions for the gifted.

More recently, in December 2000, the state board again reviewed Chapter 14 regulations and decided to separate gifted education and make it a stand-alone chapter: *Chapter 16: Special Education for Gifted Students*. Chapter 16 was reviewed during 2008 and updated with some procedural changes being made.

**What if I don't agree with what my school is telling me?**

**Independent Evaluations**

*Parents, at their own expense, may obtain an independent evaluation by a certified school psychologist. The school district is required to consider this information when making decisions regarding student identification. (22 Pa. Code §16.61 (e) (3)).*

**What if my child is gifted AND needs special education services?**

**Dual Exceptionalities**

*If a student is both gifted and eligible for special education, the procedures in Chapter 14 shall take precedence. For these students identified with dual exceptionalities, the needs established under gifted status must be fully addressed in the procedures required in Chapter 14. (22 Pa. Code §16.7(b))*

*For students who are gifted and eligible for special education, it is not necessary for school districts to conduct separate screening and evaluations, develop separate IEPs, or use separate procedural safeguard processes to provide for a student's needs as both a gifted and eligible student. (22 Pa. Code §16.7(c))*

For students who are thought to be both gifted and disabled, care must be taken by the school district to assure that both giftedness and the disability are fully addressed as part of the student's public education.

An IQ score isn't  
everything, right?

### Multiple Criteria

Criteria, other than IQ score, which indicate gifted ability include but are not limited to achievement, rate of acquisition/retention, demonstrated achievement, early skill development, and intervening factors masking giftedness.

What if I know that my  
child is at least a year  
ahead of his/her peers?

### Achievement

*A year or more above grade achievement level for the normal age group in one or more subjects as measured by nationally normed and validated achievement tests is able to accurately reflect gifted performance. Subject results shall yield academic instruction levels in all academic subject areas. (22 Pa. Code §16.21(e)(1))*

The assessment instruments should have high enough ceilings to accurately reflect academic performance in the gifted range. Assessment should yield performance and achievement data beyond basic skills and should be used for appropriate instructional placement. This data forms the basis for decisions as to where, in specific content areas, specific courses or curriculum, a student should begin the learning experiences for the year. The results of the testing must provide instructional levels in all academic subject areas for use in determining educational placement. More information is available on [www.giftedpage.org](http://www.giftedpage.org).

<b>CHARACTERISTICS OF GIFTED CHILDREN</b>		
<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>Positive Behavior</b>	<b>Negative Behavior</b>
Learns rapidly/easily	Memorizes and masters basic facts quickly	Gets bored easily, resists drill, disturbs others, underachieves
Reads intensively	Reads, uses library on own	Neglects other responsibilities
Perfectionist	Exceptional accomplishments	Intolerant of mistakes
Retains quantity of information	Ready recall and responses	Resists repetitions, "Know it all"
Long attention span	Sticks with task of personal interest	Resists class routine, dislikes interruptions
Imaginative, curious, many interests	Asks questions, gets excited about ideas, takes risks	Goes on tangents, no follow-through, disorganized
Works independently	Creates and invents beyond assigned tasks	Refuses to work with others
Alert, observant	Recognizes problems	Impolitely corrects adults
Good sense of humor	Able to laugh at self	Plays cruel jokes or tricks on others
Comprehends, recognizes relationships	Able to solve problems alone	Interferes in the affairs of others
Aesthetic insight, awareness	Appreciation of the arts	Poses personal values/ judgments on others
Highly verbal, extensive vocabulary	Fluent with words, numbers, leads peers in positive ways	Leads others into negative behaviors, monopolizes discussion
Individualistic, strong-willed	Asserts self and ideas, has small circle of friends; sense of own uniqueness	Stubborn in beliefs
Self-motivated, self-sufficient	Requires minimum teacher direction or help	Aggressive, challenges authority
Prefers older peers	Wise beyond years	Isolated or misunderstood
Highly sensitive, passionate	Emphasizes fairness, and morality, compassionate	Over-reacts to situations
Views with a different perspective	Observes across boundaries, makes connections	Resists limitations and narrowly focused content

## Gifted Myth vs Facts

**Myth** Gifted students will achieve without guidance.

**Fact** Without guidance and support, gifted students may lose motivation or underachieve.

**Myth** Gifted students should be given a large quantity of work at average grade level.

**Fact** Gifted students need a high degree of educational challenge, not more work at an average or repetitious level.

**Myth** Gifted students are 'teacher pleasers' and easy to teach.

**Fact** In order for gifted students to maintain high levels of achievement, teachers must make curricular adjustments. Without appropriate modifications, gifted students may develop behavior problems.

**Myth** Gifted students will make straight As.

**Fact** Gifted students will not always achieve, especially if unmotivated.

**Myth** Gifted students are nearly always from upper middle class professional families.

**Fact** Gifted students are from diverse racial, ethnic, and socio-economic backgrounds.

**Myth** Gifted students are often socially popular with their peers.

**Fact** Gifted students are often ostracized socially, especially at the secondary level.

**Myth** Gifted students learn best on their own.

**Fact** Gifted students benefit from being grouped with their intellectual peers for a significant part of their instructional day.

**Myth** Extra help for gifted students fosters snobbery and is likely to lead to an elitist class.

**Fact** Giftedness is fragile. Every child deserves an education which is appropriate to individual needs. Children at both extremes of the ability spectrum need special education.

**Myth** Gifted students are best served when tutoring.

**Fact** When gifted students consistently tutor others, often they are not learning anything new. This can create unhealthy self-esteem issues for both the tutored and the gifted student.

GIEP:  
Gifted Individualized  
Education Plan

The Gifted Individualized Education Plan (GIEP) is the framework of a student's program and should consist of information that is useful in providing appropriate programming and support services.

**WHAT IS A GIEP?**

The Gifted Individualized Education Plan (GIEP) is a yearly summary document that includes all curricular areas in which a gifted child is to receive education that is adapted and modified to meet his/her individual needs. Acceleration or enrichment, or both, are appropriate options. The options provided to gifted students must enable them to learn at different rates, to learn difficult material earlier, and to think at a level different from their classmates.

**How often are GIEP meetings held?**

A GIEP meeting must be held at least annually. In addition, a GIEP meeting must be held when a parent or teacher requests a meeting to develop, review, or revise a student's individualized education program.

**How are parents invited to a GIEP meeting?**

The school district must take steps to ensure that one or both of the parents of the student attend the GIEP meeting or have the opportunity to participate. An invitation to the GIEP meeting must be provided to the parents at least 10 calendar days in advance of the meeting. The meeting should be scheduled at a mutually agreed upon time and place.

### **Who participates in the GIEP meeting?**

The school district should ensure that the following people are included:

- One or both of the student's parents;
- The student if the parents choose to have the student participate;
- A representative of the school district who acts as the chairperson and is knowledgeable about the availability of resources of the district, and who is authorized by the district to commit those resources;
- One or more of the student's current teachers;
- Other individuals at the discretion of either the parents or the district.

### **How can parents contribute to the GIEP process?**

The parents of a gifted student are expected to be equal participants, along with school personnel, in developing, reviewing, and revising the student's GIEP. The parents, with the child's involvement, can contribute to the GIEP process by providing the following:

- Child's academic strengths.
- Child's talents and creative abilities.
- Evidence of leadership.
- Educational activities child pursues outside of school - projects, studies, experiments.
- Expertise the child demonstrates.
- Interests of the child.
- Special experiences - honors.
- Number of repetitions necessary to learn new skills.





#### What should be written in the GIEP?

- **Present Levels of Educational Performance** which establish the extent of gifted potential, academic functioning levels, the child's rates of acquisition/retention, and performance levels. Information would include the child's intellectual/academic assessments, grades, aptitudes and abilities, strengths, interests, and needs.
- **Annual Goals** are to be developed from the present educational performance and be reasonably calculated to yield meaningful educational benefit and student progress within one year's time. Example: To develop independent research skills.
- **Short-term Learning Outcomes** are the actions and activities that will help the child reach the annual goals, evaluation criteria to determine when the child has achieved the annual goals, and the timelines. They should include what the student will produce, how he/she will apply the skills, or what real outcome will be achieved as a result of their engaging in a study, activity, or subject.
- **Specially Designed Instruction** are the adaptations or modifications to the general curriculum, instruction, instructional environments, methods, materials, or a specialized curriculum. Specially designed instruction consists of planning and implementing varied approaches to content, process and product modification in response to the student's interests, ability levels, readiness, and learning needs.
- **Support Services** could include, but are not limited to the following: career guidance, counseling, affective education, transportation, technology education, and flexible grouping.
- **Dates** indicate when the services will begin and the anticipated duration, based on one year, of the services.

**When considering placements, should the child fit the program placement or the program fit the child?**

The program placement should be determined based on the child's needs as described in the GEIP. The intent of the law is that the program be based on the unique needs of the child, rather than the programs available in the school district.

**Are signatures required on the GIEP?**

The regulations do not require a signature on the GIEP, only the names and positions of the GIEP participants. The NORA (Notice of Recommended Assignment) indicates if parents agree or disagree with the child's program. If the parent believes the GIEP does not meet the needs of the child, then, within 5 days of the GIEP meeting, the parent must sign the NORA as I do not approve this recommendation and then state the reason for disapproval.

**Are there timelines that must be followed?**

- The GIEP shall be developed within 30 calendar days of the Gifted Written Report (GWR).
- The GIEP must be implemented no more than 10 school days after it is signed or, if a new GIEP, at the start of the following school year if completed less than 30 school days before the last day of scheduled classes.
- Parents have 10 calendar days to respond to a NORA sent by mail or 5 calendar days to a NORA presented in person at the GIEP conference.
- If parents receive the notice in person and approve within 5 calendar days, the district may not implement the GIEP for at least 5 calendar days.
- GIEP meetings are at least yearly and more frequent if needed. Any GIEP team member can reconvene a GIEP meeting at any time.

**How do you get an  
evaluation?  
Put a request in writing.**



An introduction for families to help get their children on the road to success.

*Chapter 16 requires districts to provide gifted students with specially designed instruction (§16.41(b)), and defines this instruction as adaptations or modifications to the general curriculum, instructional environments, methods, materials, or a specialized curriculum for students who are gifted. (22 Pa. Code §16.1)*

### Curriculum and Instruction

Developing specially designed instruction for gifted students is the responsibility of both the gifted support staff and regular education teachers. Assessment of the student's needs must be the basis for the specially designed instruction. It should not be a one-size-fits-all program. There are three fundamental differences that distinguish gifted learners from other learners:

- The capacity to learn at faster rates, more in-depth and with greater complexity,
- The capacity to find, solve, and act on problems more readily, and
- The capacity to manipulate abstract ideas and make connections.

Visit the PAGE website for more information at:  
[www.giftedpage.org](http://www.giftedpage.org)



### Do Not Sign Your Child's Rights Away!

Chapter 16 is Special Education in Pennsylvania Law. Gifted Education has been placed under the joint jurisdiction of PDE (Pennsylvania Department of Education) Bureau of Teaching and Learning and Special Education. Gifted education has never been mandated under federal law, but it is mandated under Pennsylvania law. Learning the terminology is one of the biggest challenges to parents.

*Do not sign a NORA (Notice of Recommended Assignment) that removes your child from the protection of gifted education law. This will enable you, the parent, to maintain your child's gifted education legal rights through the 12th grade.*

### **Educational Program Options**

A variety of educational program options are appropriate for gifted children. Check with your local gifted specialists to determine what educational program options are available in your district. Common program options include:

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#### **Curriculum Compacting**

Standard curriculum is compressed into a shorter period of time, allowing the gifted student to study related material while classmates master standard content.

#### **Cluster Grouping**

Placing a group of 5-10 identified gifted students in a classroom with other students of mixed abilities.

#### **Independent Study**

Students work independently under guidelines or a contract. Mentorships, apprenticeships, and field experiences are designed to meet students' performance levels and career interests.

#### **Grade and/or Subject Acceleration**

Progressing through an educational program at rates faster or ages younger than is conventional.

#### **Field Experiences**

Out-of-school educational experiences such as trips, workshops, and extracurricular activities. Examples: Odyssey of the Mind, Future Problem Solving, and Mock Trial.

#### **Tiered Assignments**

Adjusting the same lesson or concept to accommodate high, middle, and low readiness levels.

#### **Honors Classes**

Regular curriculum covered at a faster pace with greater depth, abstraction or complexity.

#### **Advanced Placement**

Acceleration in which students have AP classes in high school and take AP exams. AP classes alone at high school may not be adequate gifted education for many students.

#### **Post Secondary Enrollment**

Provides students with the opportunity to take college courses while earning both high school and college credit.

#### **Pull-Out Program**

Students are pulled out of the regular classroom on a scheduled basis to go to a resource room staffed by a teacher trained in the education of gifted children.

#### **Resource Room/Area**

A special classroom or area is set up for advanced learning or enrichment opportunities.

#### **Self-contained Classroom**

A classroom in which all students have been identified as gifted/high ability. This is their everyday classroom assignment.

#### **Enrichment**

Curriculum is modified to provide greater depth and breadth.

## Internet Resources

Pennsylvania Association for Gifted Education:  
[www.giftedpage.org](http://www.giftedpage.org)

Pennsylvania State Education Association:  
[www.psea.org](http://www.psea.org)

Pennsylvania PTA:  
[www.papta.org](http://www.papta.org)

Pennsylvania Dept. of Education:  
[www.education.state.pa.us](http://www.education.state.pa.us)

National Association for Gifted Children:  
[www.nagc.org](http://www.nagc.org)

Pennsylvania has a unique history in mandating special education for gifted students. The promulgation of **Chapter 16: Special Education for Gifted Students** reaffirms this legacy and commitment to the importance of specially designed instruction for gifted students. The Pennsylvania State Board of Education acknowledges in Chapter 16 that students who are gifted are "children with exceptionalities" under the Public School Code of 1949.



**Pennsylvania**  
**PTA**  
*everychild.onevoice.®*  
4804 Derry St.  
Harrisburg, PA 17111  
717-564-8985  
[www.papta.org](http://www.papta.org)

121 Penwood Road  
York, PA 17406  
Toll Free Helpline:  
888-PENNGIFTED  
(888-736-6443)  
[www.giftedpage.org](http://www.giftedpage.org)

**PSEA** PENNSYLVANIA  
STATE EDUCATION  
ASSOCIATION  
*The Power of a Great Education*  
400 North Third St.  
PO Box 1724  
Harrisburg, PA 17105-1724  
800-944-PSEA (7732)  
717-255-7000  
[www.psea.org](http://www.psea.org)