



What's the Big IDEA? # 21

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is a law ensuring services to children with disabilities throughout the nation. IDEA governs how states and public agencies provide early intervention, special education, and related services to more than 6.5 million eligible infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities. This series is designed to offer information about IDEA as amended in 2004. Each fact sheet will focus on a different aspect of IDEA.

Gifted and Talented

Your son has been reading since he was 3. His favorite question has always been “why?” He prefers talking to adults. He has creations all over his room that he has designed to play elaborate fantasy games with many rules. He loves to spend hours on the computer. You know he’s smart, so why is he in danger of failing 5th grade?

Your daughter loves school. She works hard and is very organized. Her teachers adore her because she is polite and does great work. She comes home every night, though, with a stomachache and tells you she has no friends. She will stay up until midnight redoing her homework so that it looks perfect. She wants you to check all of her work so she won’t make mistakes. She cries if she misses an answer on a test.

If these children sound familiar, you may know or be the proud parent of a gifted child!



Why are we talking about gifted children in this series on IDEA? Because in New Mexico children who are identified as gifted are given most of the same rights and protections as students with disabilities. Under the federal IDEA regulations, there are 13 identified disabilities that enable students to receive special education services. New Mexico has added the category of gifted. Gifted programs are funded through the state and through federal Javits grants.

Many people wonder why a child who is gifted need special programming. Students who are gifted are students who have an exceptionality, just as a child with a disability does. Gifted students whose needs are not met in the general education classroom run the risk of dropping out of school, having behavior problems, or having social and emotional problems because they are frustrated, bored, or discouraged.

Research shows that between 18 and 25 percent of high school dropouts are identified as gifted. Just like students with disabilities, students who are gifted drop out because their individual needs are not being met. A student who is gifted in math and science may be miserable in a gifted class that emphasizes language arts. A student whose talents lie in reading and writing might struggle in an advanced math class. Too often gifted programs are based on what the teachers like and want to teach instead of students’ needs and interests.

As a parent, you will want to be actively involved in designing your student’s gifted program. Ask what the teacher plans to do when your child finishes work in class. Does he just get more work to do? Does she become the teacher’s assistant – grading papers and helping other students? If these tasks do not challenge or inspire a gifted student they could be seen as punishments. So, the gifted child may learn to do as little work as possible.

Schools need to take proactive steps to meet the academic, behavioral, and socio-emotional needs of gifted students. Students need to be provided with a variety of services – both in and out of the classroom. Teachers need professional development on differentiating instruction and creating classrooms where all students feel safe and respected. School counselors should understand and be able to educate staff and families about the factors that contribute to gifted underachievement.

“The concept of equal educational opportunity should extend to all students, including those identified as gifted, and should be made to enable all students to reach their highest potential. Equal educational opportunity does not mean providing the same education for every student but providing the opportunities through which every student can maximize his or her individual potential.”

Technical Assistance Manual for Gifted Education – NM Public Education Department (NMPED)

The NMPED’s Technical Assistance Manual for Gifted Education is available on our website: http://www.parentsreachingout.org/resources/publications/nmped/gifted_nmped.pdf

This helpful manual addresses some misconceptions and realities of gifted students. Here are a few:

Misconception: Gifted students love school, get high grades, and greet each new school day with enthusiasm. Gifted students are the ones most enthusiastic about school and schoolwork.

Reality: Most instruction is geared for average students, which makes it hard for gifted students to get excited about going to school. Some of the most capable students in the United States end up not using their academic potential unless they are appropriately challenged and their social and emotional needs are understood and addressed.



Misconception: Teachers love to have gifted students in their classes.

Reality: Some teachers do but many do not. Some teachers feel uncomfortable with the unique learning needs of gifted students and become defensive when they suspect that their students know more about many topics than they do.

Misconception: Gifted students have intellectual capabilities that allow them to be high performing in all subjects and areas.

Reality: Although a few students are globally gifted, academic giftedness is often concentrated in a particular area, including “hands-on” or manipulative strengths that are not applicable in most classrooms. Most gifted students have a combination of academic strengths and weaknesses. Students can even be gifted in one academic area and have a specific learning disability in another.

Misconception: High-IQ students are popular, well-adjusted, exceptionally moral, and have good psychological health.

Reality: Gifted students are often socially isolated and unhappy unless they are fortunate enough to find others like themselves. Gifted students may face ridicule and taunts about being nerds or geeks if they have different interests and vocabularies that are out of touch with those of their peers.

Call PRO at 1-800-524-5176 and ask to speak to a PTI Family Liaison if you have questions about your gifted child’s program. In addition, here are a few organizations that may be of interest:

National Society for the Gifted and Talented - <http://www.nsgt.org/>

National Association for Gifted Children - <http://www.nagc.org/>

The Albuquerque Association for Gifted and Talented Students (AAGTS) - <http://www.aagts.org/>

Supporting Emotional Needs of the Gifted – <http://www.sengifted.org>

“What’s the Big IDEA?” fact sheets are developed by Parents Reaching Out under a grant from the US Department of Education, Office of Special Education. Views expressed do not necessarily represent the policy of the US Department of Education and should not be assumed to be an endorsement by the federal government.