

Finding the Right Fit:

Choosing a High School for Your Gifted Child



Navigating the Complex Process

Selecting the right high school is a major milestone for any family, but for those raising gifted children, the process can feel especially complex. Gifted learners often need more than just a strong academic curriculum. They thrive in environments that recognize and support their intellectual, social, and emotional development.

This handout offers guidance to help you evaluate prospective schools, ask meaningful questions, and advocate effectively so your child can find a place where they feel challenged, understood, and empowered to grow.

Understanding Your Child's Needs And Unique Learning Profile¹

Key Questions For You and Your Child:

1. What are your child's academic strengths and interests?
2. Does your child need any specific supports or resources?
3. What social-emotional support does your child need to succeed in school?
4. What type of learning environment helps your child thrive?

Key Factors in School Selection

- ♦Curriculum Offerings ♦ Faculty Expertise ♦
- ♦Instructional Strategies ♦ Support Services ♦
- ♦Peer Group ♦ Extracurricular Activities ♦
- ♦School Type ♦ School Size ♦ Location ♦ Cost ♦



Beyond The Label

What Gifted Students Really Need

Gifted children benefit from:

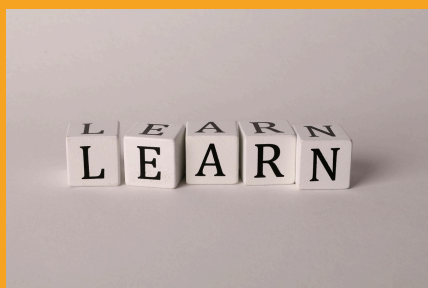
- Accelerated content²
- Depth and complexity³ in curriculum
- Differentiation⁴ and cluster grouping⁵
- Support for asynchronous development⁶
- Access to counseling and mentorship
- Interaction with like-minded peers
- Leadership skill-building

Key Questions to Ask Schools:

1. What types of advanced or accelerated coursework do you offer?
2. How do you support students with strong passions in specific academic areas?
3. What support for academic skill building⁷ and/or twice-exceptional⁸ learners does the school provide?
4. Are there extracurricular opportunities aligned with academic strengths?



Passion Projects
Research Opportunities



AP versus IB

Which is better for gifted students?

Gifted students may prefer Advanced Placement (AP) courses if they seek flexibility and subject-specific challenge, while International Baccalaureate (IB) courses may be better suited for gifted students who enjoy holistic, in-depth learning and writing and excel across multiple disciplines.



Program Models & Services

Different Paths for Different Learners

Be Familiar with Advanced Learning Options:

- Curriculum compacting⁹ or Telescoping¹⁰
- Grade-level or Discipline acceleration
- Honors and AP/IB¹¹ coursework prerequisites
- Distance education¹²
- Independent study¹³ or research opportunities
- Flexible graduation requirements¹⁴
- Dual enrollment¹⁵ or Early college¹⁶
- Problem-based learning¹⁷

Key Questions to Ask:

1. What service delivery models exist at this school?
2. What opportunities exist for gifted and advanced students to pursue academic challenges beyond the standard curriculum?
3. Is there a staff member who specializes in supporting gifted or advanced learners?

Evaluating Fit

What Nurtures, Inspires & Supports

Choosing the right high school for a gifted learner means looking beyond rankings, reputations, or course catalogs. It requires understanding how well a school's philosophy, programs, and community align with your child's cognitive and emotional needs.

Consider how the school fosters belonging and whether your child will find peers, mentors, and opportunities that nurture both their abilities and well-being.

Key Questions to Ask:

1. What is the school culture like for intellectual curiosity and creativity?
2. How does the school handle student stress, perfectionism, and social-emotional needs?
3. What are popular student activities?



**School Culture
Values & Expectations**

Advocacy Tips

1. **Start with your child!** Don't accept I'm bored, dig deeper for real issues. List strengths, challenges, and concerns.
2. **Get the facts!** Research the syllabus, curriculum, teaching style and any data on student or parent portals.
3. **Plan your request!** Bring documentation: achievement data, work samples, previous teacher feedback.
4. **Focus on collaboration:** Emphasize shared goals (e.g., engagement, challenge, progress, well-being)
5. **Ask about individualized options:** subject acceleration, compacting, enrichment
6. **Schedule a follow-up.** Revisit discussions regularly with teachers and counselors
7. **Change takes time!** Advocate respectfully & patiently for long-term impact.



Advocating for Your Gifted Child

Building Collaborative Partnerships

Even if a school doesn't offer a formal gifted program, gifted learners still deserve an education that meets their needs. Approach conversations with school personnel with curiosity and collaboration; respectful dialogue and active listening often lead to the most productive outcomes.

Questions to Ask:

1. What flexibility is there in course placement or subject acceleration?
2. Does the faculty have training in gifted education and research-based instructional strategies?
3. What support systems are in place if a student's academic performance declines or they struggle to engage with the material?

Helpful Resources For Supporting Your Child's Journey

- **Acceleration Institute** – Belin-Blank Center
 - www.accelerationinstitute.org/parents.aspx
- **Academic Advocacy for Gifted Children: A Parent's Complete Guide** – Gilman & O'Leary
 - Available at Amazon.com
- **"Advocating for Your Child in the Classroom"** – NAGC
 - <https://portal.nagc.org/page/advocating-for-your-child-in-the-classroom>
- **"Communicating Effectively with Your Gifted Child's School"** – Joan Franklin Smutny
 - <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9781003238287-51/communicating-effectively-gifted-child-school-joan-franklin-smutny>



School Visits

Research & explore schools with your child.

Learn about charter, magnet, independent, parochial, and online schools in your area.

Attend their Open Houses and/or schedule visits with Admissions to identify potential fits for your child.

- **Davidson Institute Resource Library**
 - www.davidsongifted.org/resource-library/
- **"Factors to Consider When Selecting a High School for Your Highly Able Student"** – Joan Strop
 - www.davidsongifted.org/gifted-blog/factors-to-consider-when-selecting-a-high-school-for-your-highly-able-student/
- **"Finding the Right High School"** – Bonnie Raskin
 - **Part I: A Student's Guide**
 - educationaladvancement.org/blog-finding-the-right-high-school-fit-a-students-guide/
 - **Part II: A Parent's Guide**
 - educationaladvancement.org/blog-finding-the-right-high-school-part-ii-a-parents-guide/
- **Hoagies Gifted Education Website**
 - www.hoagiesgifted.org/parents.htm
- **"How to Choose a School for a Gifted Child"** – Lisa Van Gemert
 - giftedguru.com/choose-a-school-for-gifted-child/
- **US News Early College Programs: What to Know**
 - www.usnews.com/education/best-high-schools/articles/early-college-programs-what-to-know

GIFTED EDUCATION GLOSSARY



- 1. Learning Profile** – A student’s preferred approach to learning, shaped by style (e.g., visual, auditory), intelligence strengths, culture, and gender. (Tomlinson, 2017)
- 2. Acceleration** – Advancing through curriculum (Grade or Discipline) at a faster pace or younger age than typical.
- 3. Depth & Complexity** – A framework encouraging gifted learners to analyze sophisticated ideas through layered thinking prompts, facilitating deeper thinking. (Kaplan, 2018)
- 4. Differentiation** – Tailoring instruction within the classroom to meet varied learning needs, interests, and readiness levels.
- 5. Cluster grouping** – Small group of gifted students together in a mixed-ability classroom.
- 6. Asynchrony** – A mismatch between a gifted child’s intellectual, emotional, and psychomotor development. (Silverman, 2002)
- 7. Academic Skills** – Study skills and other cognitive skills also known as *executive functioning* that manage planning, organization, and self-regulation.
- 8. Twice Exceptional** – Gifted students who also have a learning difference or disability.
- 9. Curriculum Compacting** – Streamlining instruction by skipping content a student has already mastered.
- 10. Telescoping Curriculum** – Completing curriculum in a shorter time without skipping.
- 11. AP (Advanced Placement)** – College-level courses and exams in specific subjects offered in high school. **IB (International Baccalaureate)** – Globally recognized, rigorous program emphasizing inquiry, writing, and holistic learning across subjects. (Dixon, 2018)
- 12. Distance Education** – Online learning that gives high school students access to advanced or specialized courses not offered at their school.
- 13. Independent Study** – Self-directed learning where students explore a topic of interest in-depth, working with a teacher, advisor, or expert from the school or community.
- 14. Flexible Graduation Requirements** – Alternative ways for students to meet goals, such as early graduation, online courses, college courses, or testing out of subjects.
- 15. Dual Enrollment** – Enrollment in college courses while still in high school for credit.
- 16. Early College** – Schools allow students to simultaneously work toward both a high school diploma and an associate degree or at no cost, with an organized course of study.
- 17. Problem-based learning** – Heightens both the complexity of the tasks and the motivation of the learner by engaging in real-world problems that require critical thinking. (Van Tassel-Baska, 2003)