

The Why's and How To's of Private Testing for Gifted in North Carolina

By Dr. Ronald L. Rubenzer

WHY IS IDENTIFICATION OF GIFTED CRUCIAL?

Dr. James Gallagher,¹ a world leader in gifted education, urged that not only will the flame of gifted go unnoticed if hidden under a bushel basket, the flame will actually be snuffed out. If we don't identify giftedness, not only will it go unnoticed, it may be silenced forever. Both children and society suffer when the spark of talent is snuffed out.

Sometimes individual identification or private testing will allow your child to "show what they know" more fully, particularly for the test anxious or test-inexperienced child. Identification of gifted is so important that North Carolina has mandated it since 1978.

WHO ARE THE GIFTED?

There are an estimated 144,220 academically or intellectually gifted (AIG) school children in North Carolina. But would you recognize one if he or she was your child? Einstein couldn't speak before he was four years old and couldn't read before he was seven. Beethoven's music teacher once said of him, "As a composer he is hopeless." Walt Disney was fired by a newspaper editor because he had "no good ideas." These are just a few examples to illustrate how elusive the characteristics of gifted can be.

Some characteristics to look for as signs of giftedness in a child at the pre-kindergarten level: 1. a large and accurately used vocabulary; 2. the ability to read before entering school; 3. an early discovery of cause and effect; and 4. a preference for older playmates.

WHEN TO IDENTIFY GIFTED?

In North Carolina, 4 ½ year olds functioning two to three years beyond age peers can enter kindergarten under certain guidelines (1997 General Assembly). There are also about a half dozen requirements, called "multiple criteria," (formal testing, demonstrations of ability, etc.) required for identification. Often group testing for gifted starts at about second grade level.

WHAT IS USED TO IDENTIFY GIFTED?

Group Testing

NC school systems vary widely in how they identify gifted.² Most school systems have written identification policies and procedures available from the system coordinator for gifted education. Generally students are nominated for specific group screening. Sometimes students are selected for gifted screening based on group testing provided for all students at various grade levels. The pool of identified AIG candidates from group

screenings are then matched to the best fit between their ability profiles and levels of programming. Some school districts even provide individual testing within the schools by school psychologists or other qualified professionals. Of course, parents are usually involved in every step of the procedure. Some districts require a certain level of maintained performance to remain in the gifted programs.

Private Testing

Students who show promise but are somehow missed by a system's identification systems may benefit from private, individual (out of school) testing, typically paid for by the parents. Often only results from professionals licensed to give certain individual tests (like the Wechsler IQ test series) are accepted by the school system. Sometimes schools are allowed to have a preferred provider list of licensed/certified professionals, but not always. In the event that a school does not have a preferred provider list of licensed/certified professionals, following the steps below may be helpful.

WHO (outside the school system) CAN TEST FOR GIFTED?

Licensure/Certification for Giving Tests

The first question to ask of the system is what tests will the school system accept for what level or type of placement. This will determine what type of licensure is required which will, in turn, determine who can do private testing. It is even important to know what version of a test the school will accept. For example, the WISC-IV IQ test will probably be replacing the older WISC-III IQ test during the 2003-2004 school year. The new WISC-IV was normed with a subset of gifted children as was the current WISC-III. (Wechsler, 2003). The use of certain tests (usually individual IQ tests) is often limited to licensed professionals. The WISC-IV appears to be a valuable and potentially useful identification tool for gifted according to a July 2003 technical report (Rodin, 2003; Williams, 2003).

Selecting a Licensed Professional

Make certain the individual is licensed and/or certified to give the tests required by the school. Licensed Psychologists (LPs) or Licensed Psychological Associates (LPAs) are qualified to give any psycho-educational testing needed. The North Carolina Psychological Association (1-919-872-1005, www.ncpsychology.org) can be most helpful in finding licensed professionals in your area. Even looking in the yellow pages will be helpful. Also, see *Resources* below.

Feature Article

Find out ahead of time how long the testing will take, when the results will be provided and when a formal written report will be available. Also ask the private practitioner if he will distribute the report to various school personnel or if the parent sends the copy of the report to the school.

Knowledge Base/Experience with the School System

All NC Licensed Psychologists/Licensed Psychological Associates can give the tests required for gifted placement, but it is desirable that they are knowledgeable about what specific tests should be given for each school system. Familiarity with what verbal/nonverbal tests can be used for which students is also important. It is important that the private practitioner's psychological report expresses results in a manner compatible with the school's requirements to make decisions. At minimum, if a school requires age percentiles, then the practitioner needs to provide at least this information. The practitioner needs to know what the school's AIG eligibility cut-off requirements are. It is also important that the practitioner only report scores/interpretations and not make formal recommendations for gifted programming. School programming decisions can only be made by designated school personnel.

WHAT PARENTS CAN DO

You can best help your child develop his "gifts" by becoming involved in and encouraging his early task development, but avoid pushing him. Emphasize his early verbal expression, reading, and the discussion of ideas. Have a ready supply of good books, magazines, and other aids to home learning (encyclopedias, charts, maps, etc.). Allow your child to watch carefully selected TV programs. Provide opportunities for his cultural enrichment—go to museums, art galleries, educational institutions. Provide private lessons in his strong area(s) and cultivate good taste in music, art, and other cultural interests by setting a good example yourself. Finally, all great performances start with rehearsals. Provide your child with approved, practice test experiences (see the book *How the Best Handle Stress* below).

By helping your child truly show what she knows, you will surely see your child's abilities and joy grow.

References

- ¹Gallagher, James. NCACT Spring Conference, Winston Salem, NC. March 2003.
- ²Article 9b (North Carolina) which gives each school district latitude in identifying Academically or Intellectually Gifted (AIG) children.



North Carolina Association
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- Rubenzner, R. (1979). The Brightest Kids: What Parents Can Do for Gifted Children. *New York Magazine*, June 18, 1979, Page 39.
- Rubenzner, R. (2003) *How the Best Handle Stress. Ace All Life's Tests at Home, Work and School*. Lake Norman (Cornelius), NC. Warren Publishing. 1-704-892-2940. Books in Print: http://www.booksinprint.com/php/phpFeaturedTitle.asp?Warren_Publishing When you get to this site scroll down to *How the Best Handle Stress*.
- Tannenbaum, A. J. (1983). *Gifted children: Psychological and educational perspectives*. New York: Macmillan. Page 37.
- Wechsler, D. (2003). *The Wechsler intelligence scale for children-fourth edition*. San Antonio, TX: The Psychological Corporation.
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- Williams, P. E., Weiss, L. G., Rolfus, E. (July 2003): Children identified as intellectually gifted. *Technical report #3: WISC-IV. Clinical Validity*. San Antonio, TX: The Psychological Corporation.

Resources

- Licensed Psychologists/Licensed Psychological Associates expressing special interest in Gifted: Courtesy of the NC Psychological Association, a statewide database has been developed. Please contact Dr. Ron Rubenzner at his office (1-336-272-8090) for LPs/LPAs particularly interested in working with AIG in your area.
- Valorie Hargett, Consultant Academically or Intellectually Gifted Program, Exceptional Children Division, North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, Raleigh, NC.
- Dr. Smith Goodrum, Asheville, NC, 1-828-274-1415
- Dr. Linda Silverman, Gifted Development Center, 1452 Marion Street, Denver, Colorado 80218. www.gifteddevelopment.com. Email: gifted@gifteddevelopment.com
- Dr. Gail C. Rodin, Clinical Measurement Consultant. The Psychological Corporation, 617 Ted Avenue, Raleigh, NC 27614. gail_rodin@harcourt.com.
- North Carolina Psychological Association, 1004 Dresser Court, Suite 106, Raleigh, North Carolina, 27609, 1-919-872-1005.

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