

Unwrapping Your Child's "Gifts"

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"Everyone is gifted...some just open their packages sooner!"

It is easy to agree with the sentiment suggested by this tagline: that unique interests, talents and skills may be developed in *all* children. Parents *should* recognize and celebrate their own child's abilities! However, the use of the word "gifted" in this context should not be confused with the more specific educational usage of the term "*Gifted*", referring to children who are deemed eligible for *Gifted programs* such as the one offered within Polk County Schools.

Although eligibility requirements for the Gifted program vary from state to state, it is commonly accepted that gifted children show advanced cognitive abilities and levels of intensity and awareness that differ significantly from the average child. They often learn to read early, with many reading before even entering school. They typically have large vocabularies and learn basic skills more quickly and with less practice. It is also noted that gifted children can think abstractly and draw inferences that other children need to have spelled out for them. They can have intense interests and high levels of energy. They love to learn and are highly inquisitive. It should be noted that being gifted does not necessarily result in straight A's or the behavior of a "model" student. According to the Columbus Group, "The uniqueness of the gifted renders them particularly vulnerable and requires modifications in parenting, teaching and counseling in order for them to develop optimally."

In contrast, there are many academically talented children who, although not intellectually gifted, are stellar students. Ironically, these students may outperform those who are formally identified as gifted in a regular classroom setting. Academically talented students should be challenged through the use of honors classes, enrichment opportunities and extracurricular activities.

In Florida, eligibility for the Gifted program is determined through the use of an individually administered test of intelligence as well as through the use of a gifted characteristics checklist completed by teachers and parents. Additionally, classroom grades, standardized achievement tests and other cultural characteristics are considered. According to the current criteria, students who score at or above the 98th percentile on an approved test of intellectual functioning (with an IQ around 130), along with other standards, would be considered for eligibility for the Gifted program. The process of identifying such candidates typically begins with a teacher, parent, or student making a referral to the school's Intervention Assistance Team.

The Gifted program is a necessary intervention for students whose cognitive development creates special needs that can not be met within the regular classroom setting. The existence of such a program does not negate the truth that each individual comes to this world with special gifts.

Further information regarding gifted children can be found at:

www.seng.org

www.nagc.org