

# PAGE Handbook Series

## A Parent and Guardian’s Guide to Gifted Education in Pennsylvania



Greetings,

On behalf of the PAGE Board, we are happy to present this “Parent’s Guide to Gifted Education in Pennsylvania.” Navigating the right course for your child can often 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. Daniel Rossi-Keen  
President, PAGE



*Helping Parents & Guardians  
Navigate Gifted Education*



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**ADVOCATING FOR GIFTED EDUCATION SINCE 1952**

The Handbook for Understanding and Challenging the Gifted: An Introduction for Teachers

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[www.giftedpage.org](http://www.giftedpage.org)

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## Deciphering Educational Acronyms

Acronym	Full Name
AP	Advanced Placement
GIEP	Gifted Individualized Education Plan
ER	Evaluation Report
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:** Whom 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, information that supports your issue, and information that 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, plan to use those resources. This may require that you triage among multiple issues having different levels of importance or different likelihoods of success<sup>1</sup>.

**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 the gifted students in their communities, their school districts, and for their individual child! Don't wait; take action!*

<sup>1</sup>Adapted from the National Association for Gifted Children. (2018). *Starting and sustaining a parent group to support gifted children*. Retrieved from [www.nagc.org](http://www.nagc.org)

## Finding and Identifying the Gifted

- “Each school district is required to develop and implement a system to locate and identify all students within the district who are thought to be gifted and in need of specially designed instruction” (22 PA Code, 16.21a).
- School districts are required to provide awareness activities annually designed to reach parents of all Pennsylvania students to inform them of what gifted services are available in the state and how to request them. Examples include print and online media, student handbooks, and district web sites (16.21.b).
- “Parents who suspect that their child is gifted may request a gifted multidisciplinary evaluation of their child at any time, with a limit of one request per school term. The request must be in writing. The school district shall make the Permission to Evaluate form readily available for that purpose” (22 PA Code, 16.22(c)).
- If a parent makes a request orally, the district has 10 calendar days to provide the parent with a Permission to Evaluate form so that the request may be submitted in writing (22 PA Code, 16.22(c)). The district then has 60 calendar days in which to complete the initial evaluation and present the report to the parents (22 PA Code, 16.22(j)).

### IQ 130 and Higher

“The term ‘mentally gifted’ includes a person who has an IQ of 130 or higher or when multiple criteria as set forth in this chapter and Department Guidelines indicate gifted ability. Determination of gifted ability will not be based on IQ score alone. . . Determination of mentally gifted must include an assessment by a certified school psychologist” (22Pa. 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.

OR . . .

### 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 §16.21d). 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 for that student to be admitted to a gifted program. Because disabilities and bias factors may mask gifted abilities (explained later in brochure), districts are cautioned to examine discrepancies between ability assessment results and academic achievement or demonstrated skills, and discrepancies among ability subtests.

- What if I don’t agree with what the testing results from the school?
  - 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 e3).

## Defining Giftedness in Pennsylvania

In December 2000, the State Board of Education created a separate chapter of the school code, Chapter 16: Special Education for Gifted Students. In accordance with the regulatory review process, the Board reviewed Chapter 16 during 2008, updating provisions and making procedural changes.

- Chapter 16 of the Pennsylvania School Code can be found at the following link:  
<https://www.pacode.com/secure/data/022/chapter16/chap16toc.html>

In Chapter 16, educators, administrators, and parents of gifted children will find all state regulations as they apply to gifted education in Pennsylvania. Familiarity with Chapter 16 assures that districts remain in compliance with Pennsylvania School Code. Below are additional areas that may be considered during collection and review of all available information in the determination of giftedness.

### Multiple Criteria

- Districts in Pennsylvania utilize an individualized identification matrix to determine eligibility for gifted education services. Other than IQ score, criteria which can indicate gifted ability include but are not limited to achievement, rate of acquisition/retention, demonstrated achievement, early skill development, and intervening factors masking giftedness. These are described in Chapter 22 of the Pennsylvania School Code as follows:

### 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 testable to accurately reflect gifted performance. Subject results shall yield academic instruction levels in all academic subject areas” (22 Pa. Code §16.21e1).
- 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).

### Rate of Acquisition and Retention

- “An observed or measured rate of acquisition/retention of new academic content or skills that reflect gifted ability” (22 Pa. Code §16.21(e)(2)).
- Rate of acquisition is the speed at which the student can acquire, understand, and demonstrate competency or mastery of new learning. This data can be obtained by simple procedures such as Curriculum Based Assessment (CBA); direct observation; and reporting from parents, teachers, or supervisors.

- An example of acquisition/retention: the gifted student, after approximately one to three repetitions of new knowledge/skills, can achieve mastery; other students may require four to eight repetitions. Rate of acquisition/retention is used to adjust the pace of learning for the gifted student.

### **Demonstrated Achievement**

- Chapter 16 defines this as: “Demonstrated achievement, performance or expertise in one or more academic areas as evidenced by excellence of products, portfolio or research, as well as criterion-referenced team judgment” (22 Pa. Code §16.21(e)(3)).
- A child who is gifted might display expertise that shows a high level of accomplishment and indicate exceptional interest and motivation in specific areas. These may be documented in permanent products, portfolios, demonstration of skills, awards, community involvements, or others. For example, a student is a member of the high school debate team and has qualified for the state finals in grades 9, 10, and 11; a student loves to write poetry and has a folder of unpublished works.
- 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 and 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.

### **Early Skill Development**

- Chapter 16 defines this as: “Early and measured use of high level thinking skills, academic creativity, leadership skills, intense academic interest areas, communications skills, foreign language aptitude, or technology expertise” (22 Pa. Code §16.21(e)(4)).
- Assessment of early and measured use of high level thinking skills could include checklists or inventories such as Guilford or Bloom’s Taxonomy. It could also include anecdotal notes that document developmental milestones reached earlier than average students, or skills mastered beyond that child’s age level.

### **Intervening Factors Masking Giftedness**

- “Documented, observed, validated or assessed evidence that intervening factors such as English as a second language, learning disability, physical impairment, emotional disability, gender or race bias, or socio/cultural deprivation are masking gifted abilities” (22 Pa. Code §16.21 (e)(5)).
- Some students’ gifted abilities may be hidden by factors such as ethnicity, socio-economic status, or disability. Data specifically tied to the student’s learning environment is used to make decisions on remedial/coping strategies and specially designed instruction. For example: An economically disadvantaged household where educational resources and opportunities are lacking or a household experiencing problems such as alcoholism, divorce, spouse/child abuse, or incarceration may mask the student’s identification as gifted.

## Who are the gifted?

### **Mentally Gifted**

- 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).

### **Twice Exceptional or Dual Exceptionality**

- “If a student is determined to be both gifted and eligible for special education, the procedures in Chapter 14 take precedence. For these students identified with dual exceptionalities, the needs established under gifted status in this chapter 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 or use separate procedural safeguard processes to provide for a student’s needs as both a gifted and an eligible student (22 Pa. Code §16.7c).
- 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.



## Characteristics of Gifted Children

Characteristic	Positive Behavior	Negative Behavior
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
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	May play 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	Monopolizes discussion
Individualistic, strong-willed	Asserts self and ideas, has small circle of friends; sense of own uniqueness	Firm in beliefs
Self-motivated, self-sufficient	Requires minimum teacher direction or help	May challenge 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 Children: Myth vs. Fact

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 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:** 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: Providing extra support to gifted students fosters snobbery and is likely to lead to an elitist class.

**Fact:** Giftedness is fragile. Every child deserves an education that 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.

## 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 parents of the student attend the GIEP meeting or can 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 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, etc.
  - 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 because of their engaging in a study, activity, or subject.
- *Specially Designed Instruction* includes 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 GIEP. 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 held yearly, and more frequently if needed. Any GIEP team member can reconvene a GIEP meeting at any time.

*Chapter 16 requires districts to provide gifted students with specially designed instruction (§16.41b) 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.

**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:

- **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 such as 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.
- **Advanced Placement:** Allowing access to Advanced Placement classes to students at earlier-than-usual grade level.
- **Co-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 than generally provided.

## Internet Resources

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

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

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

Pennsylvania Parent Teacher Association: [www.papta.org](http://www.papta.org)

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