

Information for Parents and Educators: What does “gifted” mean?

MISSION: Hunter College Elementary School (HCES) is a publicly funded school that serves a diverse population of children who have been identified as intellectually gifted. The Hunter curriculum is differentiated and designed to facilitate the development of students’ creative and critical thinking skills. Hunter students’ individual interests define curriculum implementation. Hunter provides avenues for students to examine topics in great depth, to accelerate their learning when appropriate, and to strive for a high standard of processing and articulating ideas. Hunter nurtures the social and emotional development of its students by encouraging them to be caring, compassionate, and responsible citizens. Hunter seeks to prepare its students to be life-long learners, leaders, and thinkers. This is accomplished in an environment that celebrates the cultural, ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity of its unique educational community.

The term “gifted” generally refers to qualities or characteristics that are a part of a person’s talents and interests that are unusually well-developed when those same characteristics are observed in others of the same age group. Giftedness is not necessarily a quality one is born with, and it is most certainly fluid—it can increase or diminish as one develops over time. Giftedness can be identified in a wide realm of talents: musical, spatial, quantitative, linguistic, interpersonal skills, etc.

Hunter College Elementary School offers a program designed specifically for children who demonstrate characteristics associated with intellectually oriented skills and talents. A gifted child may demonstrate many, but not all of the characteristics of high academic potential. Many characteristics, such as task commitment and creativity, for example, are characteristics that can be developed. Listed below are some of the characteristics of gifted children. Four-year-old children who demonstrate advanced problem solving skills, a persistent desire to know about things, and speed of learning through multiple observations, should be formally evaluated for programs that offer developmentally appropriate programming for advanced learners. HCES currently uses the Stanford-Binet, Fifth Edition (SB5) as the initial identifier for potentially advanced learners. Due to limitations in space and resources, only the children who obtain the highest SB5 scores may continue in the formal assessments by multiple observers of those students at the school. The cut-off score (percentile) is determined in mid-December.

Most experts agree that judging giftedness requires a process of observing a child’s behaviors over time, which when compared with other children of the same age, are significantly more advanced. The characteristics listed below are for reference only and should not be used as a checklist for the identification of giftedness.

Observed Characteristics of Gifted Children

Learning Characteristics

Very young children who have exceptionally strong short and long-term memory often demonstrate the learning characteristics of intellectually gifted children.

- Enjoys learning and learns rapidly; may become disinterested/bored if not able to work at faster pace
- Prefers complex and challenging tasks; may become bored with basic work or routine work
- Talks about many things of which other children are unaware; retains knowledge
- Unusually fast at recognizing relationships and patterns (e.g., cause and effect, similarities, differences)
- Verbally proficient, exhibits advanced vocabulary for age or grade level (note: native language and the language skills/vocabulary of parents have impact on English language skills development)
- Listens to and reads with comprehension at an early age (early recognition of written words and their meaning)

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- Skilled in and enjoys problem solving verbally and/or spatially (e.g., enjoys working on jigsaw puzzles meant for older children)
- Processes material to a much greater depth; questions critically
- Displays curiosity about many topics, keenly observant
- Transfers learning to new situations
- Fascination with numbers (enjoys playing with numbers)

Motivational Characteristics

- Has passionate interests, easily absorbed in activities and thoughts
- Persistent in seeking task completion
- Prefers to work independently, requires little direction
- Assumes and discharges responsibility (Some will be outgoing and assertive; others will choose to observe and quietly assess new situations before engaging in the activity; this is not the same as shyness.)
- Expresses strong beliefs

Creative Characteristics

- Displays intellectual playfulness; asks many “what if” questions; may be a nonconformist
- Enjoys experimentation; invents new methods or solutions to tasks; may be disorganized
- Displays a keen sense of humor or sees humor in subtle situations

Social-Emotional Characteristics

- May show unusual intensity in imagination, intellectual prowess and emotion; tends to be perfectionistic
- Self-confident; exceptional social awareness
- Bases friendships on similarity of interest rather than age
- Prefers older companions
- May adjust easily to new situations showing either quiet/observant or gregarious behavior

New York State Education Department’s Definition of Gifted:

The term ‘gifted pupils’ shall mean those pupils who show evidence of high performance capability and exceptional potential in areas such as general intellectual ability, special academic aptitude and outstanding ability in visual and performing arts. Such definition shall include those pupils who require educational programs or services beyond those normally provided by the regular school program in order to realize their full potential. (New York Education Law § 4452)

Sampling of Links to Websites about Gifted Children:

- Is My Child Gifted? http://giftedkids.about.com/od/gifted101/p/how_to_identify.htm
- How Can I Support My Gifted Child? http://pediatrics.about.com/cs/parentingadvice/a/gifted_child.htm
- Hoagies Gifted Education Home Page. <http://www.hoagiesgifted.org/>
- Common Myths and Truths about Gifted Students. <http://ericec.org/fact/myths.html>
- Myths and Truths about Gifted Kids. <http://school.familyeducation.com/gifted-education/parenting/38662.html>
- Gifted Children: Identification, Encouragement, and Development. <http://www.gifted-children.com/>
- NYC Dept. of Ed. website with information about their programs and resources.
<http://schools.nyc.gov/Offices/TeachLearn/OfficeCurriculumProfessionalDevelopment/GiftedTalented/default.htm>