



# Responding to the Needs of Young Gifted Learners, Ages 3-8

*A Position Statement of the  
Minnesota Educators of the Gifted and Talented (MEGT)  
www.mnegt.org*

## Purpose

Developmentally precocious young learners are found within all cultures, as well as all socioeconomic, racial, linguistic, and ethnic groups. These children have accelerated developmental rates and corresponding needs which must be recognized and addressed if they are to be provided with appropriate and equitable programming. Teachers, parents and caregivers must respond to young gifted learners' cognitive and affective differences to help them reach their full potential. Schools in particular, need to offer curricular interventions and program services that nurture the development of precocious young learners. The purpose of this position paper is to acknowledge the unique needs of young gifted learners. The goal is to encourage those who interact with these children to provide cognitively appropriate challenges and affective support on a consistent basis.

## Characteristics

Teachers and learners need help recognizing potential and the factors that distinguish precocious development which places children out of sync with expected developmental stages. Young gifted learners may demonstrate some or all of the following behaviors earlier and to a higher degree when compared to their chronological age peers. Researchers most frequently cite the following traits as indicative of precocity:

### **Cognitive Characteristics**

- ❖ Early language acquisition
- ❖ Wide knowledge base
- ❖ Exceptional curiosity and a heightened sense of wonder
- ❖ Provocative and penetrating questioning behavior
- ❖ Intrigue with big ideas
- ❖ Tenacity and passion for specific areas of interest
- ❖ Intuitive thinking
- ❖ Capacity to think creatively and to problem solve effectively
- ❖ Preference for complexity and novelty

### **Social/Emotional Characteristics**

- ❖ Heightened sense of empathy and social justice
- ❖ Tolerance for ambiguity
- ❖ Subtle or sophisticated sense of humor
- ❖ Heightened response to sensory input
- ❖ Early awareness of differences
- ❖ Leadership skills
- ❖ Perfectionistic tendencies

## Concerns and Recommendations

The following research-based guidelines are intended to help adults nurture the talents of young gifted learners.

**Frequently, typical grade level curricula does not address the cognitive needs of young gifted learners, which leads to student lack of engagement in the learning environment.** Young gifted learners need to be provided with a developmentally appropriate and intellectually challenging curriculum. This recommendation can be met through the use of a variety of instructional strategies, including curricular or grade acceleration, individual learning plans, early entrance to kindergarten, and grouping practices. The curriculum should stimulate, inspire and challenge children's thinking.



**Young gifted learners may not reach their creative potential without the intentional delivery of an appropriately engaging environment.** These learners need to be provided with playful, exploratory experiences that allow for problem-based, creative and critical thinking opportunities. These include meaningful, intriguing and interest-based experiences and activities.

**The advanced development of young gifted children may result in emotional sensitivity, social isolation, perfectionism, fear of risk taking, or anxiety.** These learners need to be provided with opportunities to spend time with intellectual peers for support and affirmation of their uniqueness and strengths as well as opportunities to interact with adults who help them develop social skills and coping strategies.

**Characteristics of young gifted learners occasionally manifest as behaviors that may be construed as negative.** Those who work with these children need to understand the complex nature of the characteristics of the gifted. This understanding will lead to a focus on the child's strengths, parent/teacher collaboration, the development of social skills, and cognitive challenge. Adults then are able to guide students whose precocity may be perceived negatively toward a more positive perception.

**Educational personnel lack an understanding of the needs of gifted students.**

Teachers, parents, and caregivers who serve young gifted learners need to be provided with professional development that addresses the needs of this unique population. The professional development experiences should include information about the wide range of developmental abilities and interests of this population and also focus on how to address students' individual needs rather than base decisions on students' chronological age. Workshops, online coursework, conferences, and online readings provide resources to teachers to assist in their capacity to engage the young gifted learner.

## References

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