

# Nurturing Gifted African American Children



**Gifted African American children may exhibit giftedness differently than others. Parents and educators must be aware of important nuances to identify and support them.**

Parents of gifted African American students have an important role in their child's education. Knowing the hurdles gifted African American children may face is the best way for parents to ensure positive academic and social experiences for their children in school.

## IDENTIFICATION

According to the NAGC Position Statement *Identifying & Serving Culturally & Linguistically Diverse Gifted Students*, scholars agree there are many challenges in creating equitable identification procedures for culturally and linguistically diverse students, including African American gifted children.

Intelligence testing can create barriers for identifying gifted African American students, as intelligence test scores are sometimes lower for racially and culturally diverse students. Many districts rely on verbal ability tests and high cutoff scores, which can unfairly discriminate. A better solution is to use one or more of the following strategies for identifying African American gifted students:

**Non-verbal tests.** Non-verbal tests focus on reasoning ability instead of language and other academic knowledge.

**Universal screening and local norms.** Universal screening (assessing all students within a grade, school, or district) gives all children the opportunity to show their strengths. Local norms (scores calculated among students of similar backgrounds) allow children's scores to be compared to other students in their school or district (rather than at the national or state level), thus highlighting those students within the school who need more challenge.

**Rating scales.** Rating scales provide information about a child that extends beyond test scores. These scales often assess characteristics of giftedness and observable behaviors such as creativity, leadership, motivation, problem solving, inquisitiveness, humor, and academic abilities. Two options include the *Traits, Aptitudes and Behaviors Scale (TABS)* and the *Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking (TTCT)*.

**Portfolios.** Portfolios provide an opportunity for educators to judge a product or collection of work that represents a student's knowledge or problem-solving ability, and offer insight into the best ways to support students in gifted education programming.

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

» Teachers can overlook potential gifted behaviors in African American students, but parents are in a key position to notice traits of giftedness in their child.

» Take time to understand characteristics of giftedness, identification procedures, and programming options so you can interact effectively with the school.

» Get involved at school! Knowing the staff and daily operations can help when thinking about ways to meet your child's educational needs.

### Dig Deeper: Identification

**NAGC Position Statement: Identifying & Serving Culturally & Linguistically Diverse Gifted Students**, [www.nagc.org](http://www.nagc.org)

**Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking**, [www.ststesting.com](http://www.ststesting.com)

**Search: A New Window for Looking at Gifted Children, A Guidebook** by M. M. Frasier et al

# African American Gifted Children

## IDENTIFICATION (continued)

Equipped with information about various identification methods, parents can work to advocate for their child's school or district to adopt equitable procedures for identifying gifted students.

## ADDRESSING STUDENT NEEDS

For gifted African American students, the type of gifted program matters. In districts that experience underrepresentation, pull-out programs or special schools may cause African American students to be one of only a few minority students in their class. Enrichment programs may allow students to remain in a more diverse environment, but can make their advanced abilities more noticeable to their classmates (which may cause social problems with their peers). Acceleration may also be available, allowing your child to move to a higher grade level or class based on his or her advanced learning needs. Being aware of the differences in programming options can help parents remain on alert to notice if students are facing any of the common difficulties that can result from the intersection of race and giftedness.

## COMMON ISSUES

There are several common race-related issues that gifted African American students may encounter at school that parents need to understand:

**Deficit Thinking.** When students fail to achieve, educators with "deficit thinking" blame the student and his or her family circumstances. Parents and teachers need to watch for deficit thinking, and look for ways to meet the academic and affective needs of the student, rather than blame circumstances.

**Microaggressions.** These are intentional or unintentional verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults based on a person's background or characteristics. Examples: Educators may make assumptions about Black students' intelligence based on their demeanor—or the way they dress and talk. Some teachers may assume that Black students know all the answers to questions during Black History Month. Students consistently experiencing microaggressions may exhibit underachievement, psychosocial issues, and stress.

**Stereotype Threat.** This is when gifted Black students fear their performance is being judged based on existing stereotypes—which can impact performance in situations such as high-stakes testing. The effects of stereotype threat can lead to a larger-than-average gap between potential and actual achievement.

**"Acting White."** Following rules in class, getting high grades, and speaking standard English can be perceived as "acting White." Gifted African American students concerned about accusations of "acting White" are less likely to take advantage of educational opportunities such as Advanced Placement classes—which, in turn, may have significant, long-term consequences.

Parent advocacy is essential. In order to be an effective advocate for a gifted African American student, parents must understand their child's needs, have ideas for meeting those needs, and be willing to communicate and collaborate with the school.



## FOR MORE INFO

*Bright, Talented, & Black: A Guide for Families of African American Gifted Learners* by Joy Lawson Davis.

Provides suggestions and resource for families of gifted African American students, focuses on common issues such as underachievement and discrimination, and prepares parents to be effective advocates.

*Young, Gifted and Black: Promoting High Achievement Among African-American Students* by Theresa Perry, Claude Steele, and Asa Hilliard.

Discusses numerous issues that face high-achieving African American students in an essay-style format.

Ford, D. Y., Dickson, K. T., Davis, J. L., Trotman Scott, M., & Grantham, T. C. (2018). A culturally responsive equity-based Bill of Rights for gifted students of color. *Gifted Child Today*, 41(3), 125–129. Addresses common issues related to gifted students of color.

(Adapted Bill of Rights also in March 28, 2018, blog at [www.nagc.org](http://www.nagc.org))



1331 H Street, Suite 1001  
Washington, DC 20005  
202-785-4268  
[www.nagc.org](http://www.nagc.org)