

Serving the Whole Gifted Child

Gifted children are so much more than their intellect or talent. Parents and educators must address all needs: cognitive, social, emotional, physical, psychological, and more. We must nurture the *whole gifted child*.

Under the leadership of George Betts (NAGC President 2015-17), the NAGC Whole Gifted Child Task Force was charged with discovering, synthesizing, and disseminating knowledge and research on the whole gifted child. *The Whole Gifted Child Task Force: Report to The NAGC Board of Directors* was published in 2018.

The report's main takeaways include:

- By focusing strictly on academic achievement, we divert attention away from the encompassing learning needs of the whole child.
- Empowering the whole gifted child requires that we look beyond test scores and consider gifted traits, characteristics, and behaviors.
- When gifted children feel understood, accepted, and appreciated for who they are—not solely for what they can do at the time—children are more likely to take academic risks, accept academic challenges, and feel confident with their efforts.
- By considering all dimensions of the whole gifted child, gifted students are enfranchised and empowered.
- Building self-esteem and resilience within our students opens endless opportunities.

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER UNDERSTANDING

What does the task force recommend regarding identification and services?

Educators and parents must recognize:

- That giftedness exists as part of the human experience and is seen in various contexts.
- Gifted children must develop healthy coping strategies, well-being, and a strong sense of self alongside talent areas.
- That gifted children have an identity beyond their talent area(s).
- The importance of universal screening with valid and reliable measures.
- The need to identify using a holistic profile.
- The necessity of providing services that include non-cognitive factors that affect the development of a gifted child.
- The critical nature of incorporating personalized learning: support interests, passions, and ideas.
- The focus should be on developing strengths.

The Whole Child Task Force built their recommendations around concepts illustrated through NAGC's *Giftedness Knows No Boundaries* campaign, which calls for adults to SEE, UNDERSTAND, TEACH, and CHALLENGE gifted and talented children from all backgrounds as they reach for their personal best.



FOOD FOR THOUGHT

» Reflect: The impetus for NAGC's Whole Gifted Child Task Force was based on George Betts' *Six Essentials that Benefit the Whole Gifted Child*:

1. Unconditional positive regard.
2. Development of self.
3. Emotional, social, cognitive, and physical development.
4. Passion learning (pursuing what you love).
5. Working together.
6. Seeking to better the world.

» Read: *The Whole Gifted Child* by George Betts (Nov 10, 2016)
www.nagc.org/blog/whole-gifted-child



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QUESTIONS FOR BETTER UNDERSTANDING

How do the task force findings connect to NAGC's message of "See Me: Identifying Underrepresented Populations?"

Giftedness crosses all cultures, races, and socio-economic groups, yet the students served in gifted programs rarely proportionately reflect this scenario. Underrepresented groups include learners who are:

- Of specific ethnicities and races, including Black and Latinx;
- Twice exceptional (2e), meaning: A child's disabilities tend to mask their superior abilities, their giftedness camouflages disabilities; or the two cancel each other so they are not identified at all; and/or
- From backgrounds of poverty where less than half are likely identified.

Inequitable or unjust resources and opportunities promote the vicious cycle of educational disparities.

How do the findings connect to NAGC's message of "Understand Me: Giftedness in Context?"

Complex interactions of environment, identity group, and development define the experiences of all children. However, being gifted may create an additional layer of complexity, as the lens through which gifted children experience the world may be fundamentally different than the vast majority of their peers.

How do the findings connect to NAGC's message of "Teach Me: Developing Psychosocial Competencies and Well-Being?"

Serving the whole gifted child requires more than intensive and challenging academic or talent development experiences. It's also essential to develop the psychosocial competencies of a child. Furthermore, adults may be unaware of gifted students' psychological distress as many gifted children are high achievers even when struggling psychologically. We must teach our students to develop psychosocial competencies associated with high performance and well-being in the face of competition and challenges.

How do the findings connect to NAGC's message of "Challenge Me: Address Underachievement and Vary Instructional Strategies?"

Challenge takes the form of appropriate levels of rigor. Educators and parents should:

- Provide purposeful levels of curriculum and instruction.
- Focus on higher depth of knowledge learning tasks.
- Implement student-directed learning.
- Accelerate students.
- Build on strengths and interests.
- Offer choice in learning experiences.
- Encourage a continuum of complexity.
- Preassess in order to form flexible groups effectively.

Ultimately, by recognizing and supporting the needs of the whole gifted child—including cognitive, social, emotional, physical, and psychological needs—parents and educators empower gifted children to reach their personal best.



FOR MORE INFO

» Read:

Kochar-Bryant, C. A., & Heishman, A. (2010). *Effective collaboration for educating the whole child*. Sage.

NAGC Whole Gifted Child Task Force. (2018, March). *The whole gifted child task force: Report to the NAGC board of directors*. bit.ly/NAGC_WGC

Nilles, K., Jolly, J. L., Inman, T. F., & Smutny, J. F. (2019). *Success strategies for parenting gifted kids: Expert advice from the National Association for Gifted Children*. Prufrock Press.

Trepanier, C. (May 12, 2015). Gifted education is about the whole child. *Education Week*. <https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2015/05/13/gifted-education-is-about-the-whole-child.html>

» Download:

Giftedness Knows No Boundaries campaign messages and free posters



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