

March 2025



## DEAR MS. M

Gifted Education Questions Answered

Dear Ms. M,

### Why is it important to protect the rights of gifted students?

As educators dedicated to supporting gifted students, we deeply understand and appreciate that these learners often face unique challenges that require thoughtful attention and specialized care. Gifted students need an educational environment that fosters their potential and addresses their specific unique needs.

Unfortunately, gifted students can easily become disengaged and frustrated with their academic experience without proper instructional and social-emotional support. It is essential that we, as gifted educators and advocates, protect their rights to receive an education that challenges and nurtures them in every possible way.

Gifted students are not defined solely by their academic abilities or high-test scores. Their exceptionalities can widely vary and can include creativity, problem-solving, advanced cognitive skills, and exceptional talents in fields like music and art. A “one-size-fits-all” approach to teaching does not serve their gifted needs. To truly support them, we must recognize that their intellectual abilities require a more tailored approach - whether it be acceleration, curriculum compacting, enrichment, or specialized programs. We also need to be mindful of their social and emotional needs. Many students feel out of place in a traditional classroom and may struggle to connect and relate with their same-age classmates. Providing “safe” spaces where they can engage with their intellectual peers is just as important as meeting their academic needs.

In New Mexico, where we embrace our diverse gifted population, we must ensure that all gifted students, regardless of their background, must have access to the supports they need. It is essential that we advocate for equal representation and inclusion of gifted students from all walks of life, including those from underserved communities. We must also be aware of the impact of isolation, both social and emotional, that can come with a gifted learner. Social-emotional learning and guidance support play a key role in helping our gifted students navigate the complexities of their talents - setting them up for success in the future.

Thankfully, in our state, there are legal protections in place to support gifted and talented education since 1978. The state of New Mexico offers policies and partial funding for gifted programs - though implementation can vary from district to district - we are moving towards more equitable, inclusive, and robust gifted education programs in our school districts in the future. As gifted educators and advocates, we must be familiar with the resources available in our schools and advocate for their proper use. Whether it’s through acceleration, differentiation, curriculum-compacting, or mentorship, our gifted students should have access to programs designed for them and that meet their needs. We also need to ensure that their educational rights are safeguarded through Gifted Individual Education Plans (GIEPs).

These tools are designed to provide personalized academic experiences to help gifted students succeed and excel.

As we continue to advocate for gifted learners, it's essential to collaborate. Protecting the rights of gifted students means ensuring they are given the opportunities, resources, and emotional support they need to thrive. By advocating for specialized programs and providing caring, inclusive space for learning, we can help gifted students in New Mexico reach their full potential and become the next generation of leaders, creators, and thinkers. Let's continue working together to support these exceptional and talented learners in every way possible.

Kate Morris, MEd Gifted Education

*Kate Morris is CES's Gifted TAP Consultant. She has been in gifted education for 10 years as a gifted educator and gifted instructional coach. She works for Central Consolidated School District in northwest New Mexico serving gifted and talented students in CCSD's Gifted, Talented, and Creative Program. Kate is the president-elect of the New Mexico Association for the Gifted.*