

Who is the Gifted Learner?

Section 162.675. RSMo defines gifted children as learners who

- exhibit precocious capacity and learning potential;
- are identified by competent professionals; and
- need an academic environment beyond standard grade level curriculum.

Gifted individuals exhibit many characteristics including, motivation to learn new things, effective and inventive problem-solving strategies, insight to quickly grasp new concepts and make connections, advanced reasoning skills, and imagination and creativity to produce original ideas.

Gifted learners share a common characteristic: *asynchrony*, the difference between cognitive, emotional, and physical development. This defining characteristic means that gifted students can develop unevenly across skill areas. To best meet the needs of gifted students, an understanding of individual strengths and areas for growth is needed so that a range of services can be offered. Gifted students thrive when social-emotional learning is supported.

Social-Emotional Needs of Gifted Learners

Gifted learners have unique and diverse developmental needs. Research shows that gifted students are, on average, as well adjusted as their peers. However, literature also suggests that students who are identified as gifted are disproportionately prone to social or emotional concerns. Therefore, we need to consider each student's needs, while at the same time, studying the population as a whole.

Social-Emotional Traits in Gifted Learners

Many gifted children need targeted assistance with asynchronous development, self-understanding, peer relationships, perfectionism, situational stressors, and post-secondary planning.

Research shows that gifted students who participate in gifted education programs are able to make and keep friends. Gifted learners whose academic needs are met exhibit strong self-concept. However, students whose academic needs are not met may lack social competence and self-concept.

Many teachers and parents are concerned that gifted students will succumb to unhealthy perfectionism. Researchers are now studying functional and dysfunctional perfectionism and it is not clear that gifted learners suffer from maladaptive perfectionism.

Researchers have long sought to understand and explain a greater perceived impact of experience among gifted students. Gifted learners often experience phenomena more deeply than their peers. The broad title for discussing these concerns is "gifted intensity." It is important that gifted children are taught to see their "gifted intensity" as a normal response for them.

Internalizing their experiences, gifted learners can show signs of underachievement, anxiety, and depression. This becomes more complex when the student also identifies as multicultural, non-binary, or is twice-exceptional.

(adapted from Wiley, 2020)



Social and emotional needs are at the heart of well-being and the foundation for achievement for all children.

-Maureen Neihart, Psy.D.

The COVID-19 pandemic is causing additional social-emotional concerns for some gifted learners. They may exhibit intense feelings fearing for their own family or others who are experiencing difficulties. Gifted children may exhibit increased, anxiety, sadness, intense feelings, and out-of-the-ordinary behavior. Gifted children and teens can manage intensities and anxieties in healthy ways, and channel energies to support positivity in themselves and in the community. ([Supporting Your Gifted Child During COVID-19](#), NAGC)



Missouri Gifted Social-Emotional Learning Curriculum

Missouri gifted education specialists collaborated to create a repository of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) curriculum for gifted learners. Lessons were developed for five strands: Self Awareness, Mindsets, Social Capacity, Life Skills, and Emotional Well-being. In addition, sub-topics were determined for each strand. The repository can be found on AirTable, a searchable database:

<https://airtable.com/shrBDwi2DDaYHuqre>.

The repository was carefully designed to be a “living” collection of SEL lessons; gifted education specialists may submit lessons to be reviewed and added to the repository. Please direct questions about submitting lessons to mogiftedsel@gmail.com. To access the curriculum and to learn more about submitting lessons please go to: bit.ly/mo-gifted-sel.

Resources

Gifted Association of Missouri (GAM), <http://www.mogam.org/>

Missouri Suicide Prevention Network, <https://www.mospn.org/>

National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC), <https://www.nagc.org/>

Show Me Hope, <https://www.moshowmehope.org/>

Supporting Emotional Needs of the Gifted (SENG), <https://www.sengifted.org/>

Wiley, KR. The social and emotional world of gifted students: Moving beyond the label. *Psychol Schs.* 2020; 57: 1528– 1541. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.22340>

Recommendations for Educational Practice

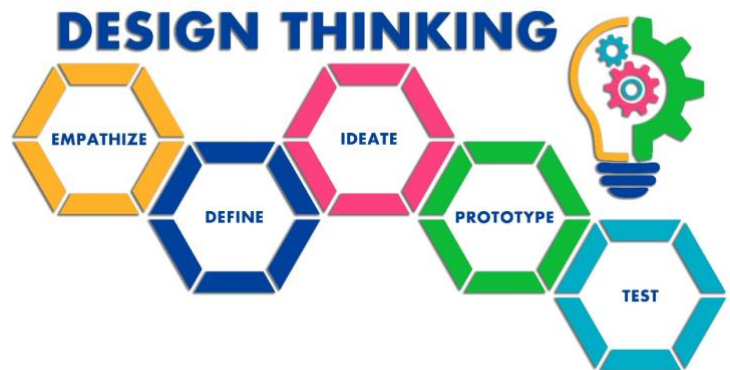
- Address the child, not the label. Each student has a unique set of circumstances and needs.
- Seek to provide peers. Students identified as gifted reach across developmental differences to form social circles, but it is important to not stand alone with those differences. A peer group can be provided through a variety of academic tools, including but not limited to, equitable identification practices, cluster grouping, acceleration, gifted education classes, and clubs.
- Utilize equitable practices to identify traditionally underrepresented gifted students.
- Challenge gifted students academically. Utilize pre-tests, benchmark testing, class work, and student observations, to determine content knowledge and skill level. Accelerate students as needed. Provide challenging project-based learning opportunities.
- Help students find an extra-curricular activity that suits their talents and interests. Extra-curricular activities represent a crucial component of social-emotional support for many students.
- Provide social-emotional learning experiences.
- Engage the entire community surrounding gifted students. Communication with stakeholders can result in increased support from school, home, and community.
- Utilize design thinking to solve problems.

(adapted from Wiley, 2020)

Using Design Thinking to Solve Problems

Design Thinking is an iterative process in which the user seeks to understand the situation, challenge assumptions, and redefine problems in an attempt to identify alternative strategies and solutions that might not be instantly apparent. Design Thinking is a powerful tool to solve problems. Developed at Stanford’s Design School, it is popular in many fields and can be applied to social-emotional concerns. Learn more at:

<https://dschool.stanford.edu/resources>



For more information on gifted education in Missouri please visit our website or contact Christine Nobbe, Director of Gifted Education.

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