



ADVOCACY FOR GIFTED AND TALENTED EDUCATION  
IN NEW YORK STATE, INC.

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**Comments of New York State Advocacy for Gifted and Talented Education (AGATE)  
Re: Gifted Admission Policy in the New York City Public Schools**

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The education of gifted children in New York City has long been addressed in a variety of ways. Included among these have been citywide specialized schools and programs, local magnet schools, IGC (intellectually gifted children) classes, and other forms of instructional intervention. The term “gifted” has many definitions and dimensions. In this document, we refer to the term as it has been defined by New York State as follows:

The term ‘gifted pupils’ shall mean those pupils who show evidence of high performance capability and exceptional potential in areas such as general intellectual ability, special academic aptitude, and outstanding ability in visual and performing arts. Such definition shall include those pupils who require educational programs or services beyond those normally provided by the regular school program in order to realize their full potential.” (New York Education Law Chapter 740, Article 90, Section 4452.a)

We suggest that admissions procedures for gifted programs be carefully designed, structured, and implemented in order to ensure that there is sufficient congruence between the admissions process, including identification, and the actual intervention offered to children in a gifted program. This paper includes background information on the admissions process and recommendations from AGATE.

## **Background**

There has long been a debate about the specifics of how to recognize and address the talents of gifted children. Many experts in the field consider the identification of gifted children as an ongoing problematic issue. As the definition of gifted students indicates, these pupils require educational programs or services beyond those normally provided by the regular school program to meet their potential. Preceding any academic participation in these programs and services has been a need to craft an admissions process that includes accurate identification. An efficient and effective identification process is a critical part of any form of best practices designed to meet the needs of a gifted population at all levels of education programming.

In general, intervention programs for gifted children have presented customized, qualitatively differentiated experiences that focus on self-directed, advanced content learning that often involves project work. Most interventions for gifted students explicitly teach critical and creative thinking skills, productive thinking strategies, and the application of these learning and reasoning strategies to a wide spectrum of academic and creative endeavor. Programs designed for gifted learners emphasize exposure to experiences that not only require the intellectual participation of the learner, but encourage the application of the learner's talent in original and stimulating ways.

Now that we are well into the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we must continue to ensure that identification procedures used in the admissions process to identify children, especially very young children, acknowledge potential giftedness within a diverse population of applicants. Identification procedures need to be both balanced so to include effective and efficient identification instruments, and sensitive to the increasing multilingual, multicultural, and multiethnic composition of the New York City public schools. To this end, we suggest the guiding principles of student identification as advanced by the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) to assist in this identification process. These include:

- Instruments used for student assessment to determine eligibility for gifted education services must measure diverse abilities, talents, strengths, and needs in order to provide students an opportunity to demonstrate any strengths
- A student assessment profile of individual strengths and needs must be developed to plan appropriate intervention
- All student identification procedures and instruments must be based on current theory and research

### **AGATE’S Recommendations for Identification of Gifted Children**

At the outset, it is important to note that our organization, New York State Advocacy for Gifted and Talented Education (AGATE), does not subscribe to any one theory of the nature of human abilities, their origins, and hence their identification. Because gifted children, as a group, are not monolithic, any approach in identifying them must be flexible and equitable as well. We assert that there are children who demonstrate high performance, or who have the potential to do so, and that we have a responsibility to provide optimal educational experiences for talents to flourish in as many children as possible, for the benefit of the child, the community, the nation, and the world.

The following principles are ones that AGATE suggests be included in an identification process that involves gifted children. These multiple principles pertain to specific components of the identification process which should be well in place before any testing takes place:

- identification should be based upon an agreed-upon definition of giftedness
- identification procedures must be congruent with educational goals for a program
- identification should be part of an overall school program that also includes differentiated curriculum, appropriate levels of instruction, and ongoing professional development for teachers
- identification instruments must be recognized for their strengths and weaknesses
- identification criteria should be clearly outlined, available to all, and explained
- identification should utilize appropriate testing instruments for special populations

Any identification process should include information obtained about children from multiple sources. Therefore, the following recommendations focus on a balanced approach to

identification that include appropriate identification instruments, observable performance activities, case study information, and

### **Recommendation 1: Identification Instruments**

AGATE endorses NAGC guidelines for testing procedures associated with identifying gifted children. Anyone involved in administering, selecting, or consulting on testing and identification practice should:

- Understand measurement principles, including how to evaluate the test's technical claims (e.g., validity and reliability);
- Know about the particular test used, its appropriate uses, and its limitations, including possible consequences resulting from scores;
- Administer, score, and interpret results in a professional and responsible manner;
- Employ procedures necessary to reduce or eliminate bias in test selection, administration, and interpretation;
- Understand the influence of cultural diversity, linguistic diversity, and socioeconomic disadvantages on test performance; and weigh the results of tests carefully with other information.

For example, there are concerns that the Otis-Lennon School Abilities Test (OLSAT) and the Bracken School Readiness Assessment (BSRA) do not adequately test young pre-K children who will be entering kindergarten. First, the OLSAT brochure and website state that “OLSAT consists of seven levels that collectively assess the range of ability of students in Kindergarten through Grade 12.” Second, tests such as the OLSAT are primarily used for screening before administering other tests with a higher ceiling that more accurately identify the most intellectually advanced children. Third, the OLSAT does not accurately find children with advanced abilities in divergent thinking. Included in this paper is a chart (Table 1) that gives information about a number of tests used to identify students for gifted programs. This chart states the type of test, the age group for which it is appropriate, the purpose, and the time required to administer the test. This information can be helpful in evaluating tests currently used and selecting the most appropriate identification instruments.

## **Recommendation 2: Performance Activity**

We suggest the inclusion of a “performance activity” as an important addition to the criteria the New York City Department of Education utilizes for entrance into a kindergarten program. Observing candidates for a kindergarten gifted program as they participate in individual and group classroom activities that parallel the typical kindergarten classroom yields important data regarding the potential of the child. The best identifier of gifted children, most frequently, is observable gifted behaviors. Observations of interactions with peers and teachers are examples of some information that can be included in this data point. We recommend that New York City DOE create its own set of performance standards that are locally developed, tested, and assessed and provide clear direction and guidelines against which gifted behaviors can be referenced. These identification procedures should be scalable in the sense that they will be able to be modified and added to based upon, for example, research findings or any demographic shifts.

## **Recommendation 3 :Case Study Approach**

In addition to using an appropriate identification instrument and performance activities, a case study approach can gather information about a child from parents and teachers that reflects an accurate and authentic learning profile of the child’s strengths and talents within one portfolio. Consideration should be given to the child’s intellectual achievement as evidenced by scores on any instruments used in identification, along with language status and observation data provided by experts who have viewed the child in simulated classroom experiences. Parent data, providing information as to when their child reached significant developmental milestones, can also be obtained in the form of a brief questionnaire. All of these data can then be adequately reviewed and assessed before a final admissions decision is made.

#### **Recommendation 4: Early Identification**

AGATE suggests identification to continue to occur as early as possible in a child's school career so that early intervention can be provided to ensure measurable and meaningful intellectual, social, and emotional progress. Identification should also be used for the acquisition of diagnostic information essential for the provision of appropriate educational services.

#### **Conclusion**

We recognize the many challenges and complexities that the New York City Department of Education faces in operating the largest urban school organization in the United States and commend the Department of Education for their efforts in ensuring that gifted children are fully accommodated within its system. That they are willing to offer a citywide program to meet the direct needs of gifted students, and continue to refine the identification process of this program is laudable.

When the identification process of gifted children is one that is well-structured, comprehensive, thoughtful, and carefully implemented, it can help alert schools to the potential of these students and help them plan more effectively for them. When gifted students are accurately identified, this important first step can lead to the crafting of intervention that allows these students to fully develop their special talents and intellectual abilities for maximum contribution to society. It is also important to accomplish this process as early as possible so that young children's attitudes, motivation, and energies can be successfully and positively shaped by early academic experiences.

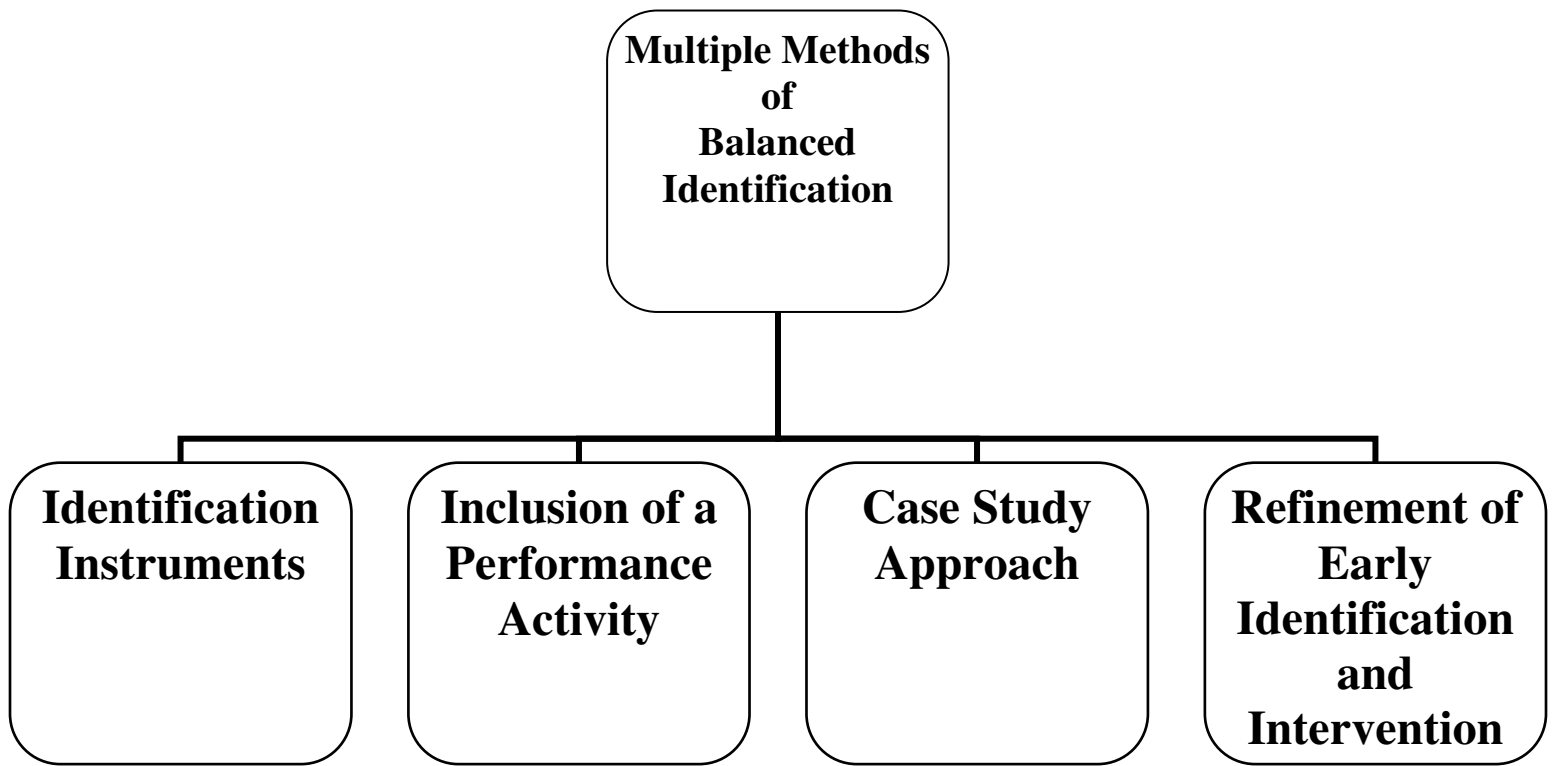
| <b>Instrument and Type</b>   | <b>Publication Date</b> | <b>Type</b>                 | <b>Age Group</b>                     | <b>Purpose</b>   | <b>Time to Administer</b>                |
|--|-------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|--|
| Bracken (BSRA)-<br>Individual  | 2007                    | Assessment                  | 2yrs, 6<br>mos to<br>7 yrs 11<br>mos | Assess academic<br>readiness                                 | 10-15 mins                               |
| Brigance-<br>Individual  | 2005                    | Screening/<br>Diagnostic    | K                                    | Identify strengths;<br>Assess school readiness               | 10-15 mins<br>for screening              |
| CogAT-6 (Cognitive<br>Abilities Test)<br>Group   | 2002                    | Assessment                  | K-12                                 | Appraise cognitive<br>development and<br>reasoning abilities | 120-170 mins<br>for entire<br>instrument |
| Developmental Indicators<br>for Assessment of<br>Learning- (DIAL-R)<br>Individual      | 1990                    | Screening/<br>Instructional | 2- 5yrs<br>11mos                     | Identify potentially<br>advanced children                    | 20-30 mins                               |
| Early Screening Profiles-<br>(ESP)- Individual   | 1990                    | Screening                   | 2-6 yrs<br>11 mos                    | Identify potentially<br>gifted children                      | 15-40 mins                               |
| Naglieri Nonverbal<br>Ability Test<br>(NNAT-1)<br>Group                                | 2003                    | Screening                   | 5- 17<br>YOA                         | Measure of non-verbal<br>reasoning skills and<br>ability     | 30-40 mins                               |
| Otis-Lennon School<br>Ability Test (OLSAT 8)-<br>Group                                 | 2003                    | Screening<br>Assessment     | K-12                                 | Evaluate student<br>thinking and reasoning<br>skills         | 60-75 mins                               |
| Stanford-Binet- Early<br>SB5-<br>Individual  | 2005                    | Assessment                  | 2 yrs to 7<br>yrs 3 mos              | Assess intelligence and<br>Cognitive abilities               | 15- 50 mins                              |
| Woodcock-Johnson- III-<br>Individual   | 2001                    | Diagnostic                  | 2-90<br>YOA                          | Measure cognitive<br>ability                                 | 35- 115 mins                             |
| Wechsler Preschool and<br>Primary Scale of<br>Intelligence (WPPSI-<br>III)- Individual | 2002                    | Assessment                  | 2 yrs 6<br>mos- yrs<br>3 mos         | Assess intelligence and<br>general aptitude                  | 60- 75 mins                              |
| Wechsler Abbreviated<br>Scale of Intelligence-<br>(WASI)                               | 1999                    | Assessment                  | 8-89<br>YOA                          | Test of intelligence   | 15-30 mins                               |

**Table 1. A Comparison of Potential Identification Instruments**

For individual test reviews go to: *Buros Institute Test Reviews*: <http://buros.unl.edu/buros/jsp/search.jsp>

\*Reference: Niemeyer, J. & Scott-Little, C. (2002). *Assessing kindergarten children: A compendium of assessment instruments*. Washington, D.C. Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, (Contract no. ED-01-CO-0015.)

## **AGATE Recommendations for Balanced Identification of Gifted Students**



**Table 2: Summary of AGATE Recommendations**

## References on Identification of Gifted Students

- Brown, Scott W.; Renzulli, Joseph S.; Gubbins, E. Jean; Siegle, Del; Zhang, Wanli; Chen, Ching- Hui. (2005). Assumptions Underlying the Identification of Gifted and Talented Students. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 49(1), 68-79.
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- Colangelo, N., & Davis, G.A. (Eds.). (2003). *Handbook of gifted education* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Boston, Massachusetts: Allyn and Bacon
- Coleman, Mary R. (2003). The identification of children who are gifted. ERIC Digest E644. Retrieved on 12/9/2008 at <http://www.nagc.org/index.aspx?id=169>
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- Tannenbaum, A. (1992). Early signs of giftedness: Research and commentary. *Journal for the Education of the Gifted*, 15(1), 104-133.
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- Urban, K.K. (1997). Promotion of very able children of preschool age. *Early Childhood Development and Care*, 130, 21-29.
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- Wright, L., & Borland, J. H. (1993). Using early childhood developmental portfolios in the identification and education of young, economically disadvantaged, potentially gifted students. *Roeper Review*, 15, 205-210.

#### GENERAL WEB SITES FOR GIFTED EDUCATION

**The following web sites are general references on gifted children. Many of them contain information on research and practice concerning the identification process:**

National Association for Gifted Children

[www.nagc.org](http://www.nagc.org)

Advocacy for Gifted and Talented Education in New York

[www.agateny.com](http://www.agateny.com)

Hoagies' Gifted Education Page

<http://www.hoagiesgifted.org/>

University of Connecticut: Center for Gifted Education and Talent Development

<http://www.gifted.uconn.edu/>

Johns Hopkins University Center for Talented Youth Resource Page

<http://www.jhu.edu/gifted/imagine/linkW.htm>

World Council of Gifted and Talented Children

<http://www.gifted.uconn.edu/>

Council for Exceptional Children- Association for the Gifted  
<http://www.cectag.org>

The Davidson Institute  
<http://www.ditd.org/public/>

NYS Gifted & Talented Education Policy overview from The Davidson Institute:  
<http://www.gt-cybersource.org/StatePolicyDetails.aspx?StateCode=10035&NavID=>

Online Gifted Conference  
<http://www.neiu.edu/~ourgift/pages/Conference.htm>

Genius Denied  
<http://www.geniusdenied.com/>

Report on US schools holding back America's brightest kids:  
<http://www.nationdeceived.org/>

#### **UNIVERSITY AND ORGANIZATIONS FOR GIFTED EDUCATION**

The Center for Talented Youth at the The Johns Hopkins University  
<http://www.jhu.edu/~gifted/>

Duke University Talent Identification Program  
<http://www.tip.duke.edu/>

Center for Talent Development at Northwestern University  
<http://www.ctd.northwestern.edu>

Vanderbilt University Programs for Gifted Youth  
<http://pty.vanderbilt.edu/speakers.html>

Education Program for Gifted Youth at Stanford University  
<http://www-epgy.stanford.edu/epgy/>

Connie Belin & Jacqueline N. Blank International Center  
for Gifted Education and Talent Development (CBJNB International Center)  
<http://www.uiowa.edu/~belinctr/>

Center for Gifted Education Policy, American Psychological Association  
<http://www.apa.org/ed/cgep.html>

Gifted Development Center  
<http://www.gifteddevelopment.com>

Mensa  
<http://www.mensa.org/>

National Consortium for Specialized Secondary Schools of Science, Mathematics, and  
Technology (NCSSSMST)  
<http://www.ncsssmst.org>

National Foundation for Gifted and Creative Children  
<http://www.nfgcc.org/>

SENG (Supporting the Emotional Needs of the Gifted)  
<http://www.SENGGifted.org/>

TAGFAM's home page  
<http://www.tagfam.org>

World Council for Gifted and Talented Children  
<http://www.WorldGifted.org/>