

**SMPG: The Heart of SENG**  
**Educating Our Gifted: A Continuing Challenge**  
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[http://www.sengifted.org//SMPG/smpg\\_march11\\_column.shtml](http://www.sengifted.org//SMPG/smpg_march11_column.shtml)

*In 1981, SENG established guidelines for SENG Model Parent Support Groups (SMPGs). SMPGs bring together groups of interested parents of gifted and talented children to discuss such topics as motivation, discipline, stress management, and peer relationships. This column offers information and advice based on the experience of trained SMPG facilitators, both to apply in their own parent groups and for other parents to use and learn from. Learn more about the SMPG program at [http://www.sengifted.org/smpg\\_parent\\_groups.shtml](http://www.sengifted.org/smpg_parent_groups.shtml).*

With much of the nation's attention currently focused on raising non-proficient students' performance to meet proficiency standards, it is difficult to create a sense of urgency for the needs of gifted students because many of them score well on standardized tests. But some gifted students are falling through the cracks. The myth still persists that gifted students can get a good education on their own.

While gifted students may have extraordinary potential, without instruction that meets their individual academic and social emotional needs, their potential may be squandered. The social emotional needs of gifted students are often intensified by the characteristics that make them gifted. If we fail to understand their needs, if their needs are not met, gifted children can be at risk for academic underachievement, social isolation, and depression. It is often quoted that 18 to 22% of high school dropouts are gifted students.

Most gifted students in this country receive the majority of their instruction in a regular classroom with teachers who have not been trained to teach gifted students. Teaching the gifted student in the regular classroom can be challenging, but also rewarding for teachers who are open minded and willing to learn about the needs of gifted students. Having a gifted child in your class can be exciting because they are hungry for knowledge, but at the same time exhausting because of their emotional intensities. It is not enough to give them "more of the same."

We cannot succeed with our gifted students if we use a "one size fits all" approach. With careful

planning combined with creativity and a commitment to appropriately educating the gifted child, most school districts can meet this challenge by offering a mix of clustering, differentiation, acceleration, and coaching or mentoring.

Clustering gifted students allows them time with "like-minded peers." Gifted students will choose more challenging tasks when other gifted students are participating in activities designed around their passions and learning interests. Differentiation is essential for the gifted students to move forward. Differentiation strategies are based on regular pre-assessments to adjust the lessons to give the gifted student advanced areas of knowledge, rather than asking them to sit through something they already know.

Acceleration steps up the curriculum by finding the best match between the level of curriculum and students' abilities and readiness. Coaching, mentoring, and counseling strategies provide a gifted student with opportunities to explore and adjust to their unique social and emotional characteristics, as well as teach self-advocacy. Early college and career counseling is essential to gifted students who often struggle with multipotentiality.

Our gifted students have the potential to be our future scientists, engineers, teachers, business and political leaders. This nation must commit to educating and developing the talents of its best and brightest students and to foster their growth. If we fail to meet this challenge, we are risking the survival of our nation. Meeting the challenge of educating the gifted may preserve the future of our nation.